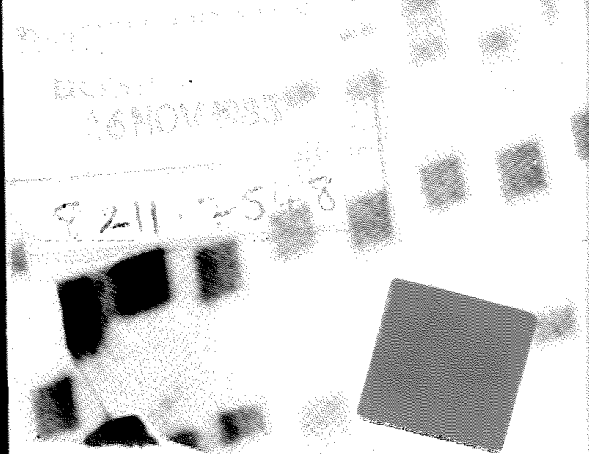


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# SCREEN

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University of East Anglia, 15-18 December 1983

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# MASCULINITY AS SPECTACLE

REFLECTIONS ON MEN  
AND MAINSTREAM CINEMA  
BY STEVE NEALE

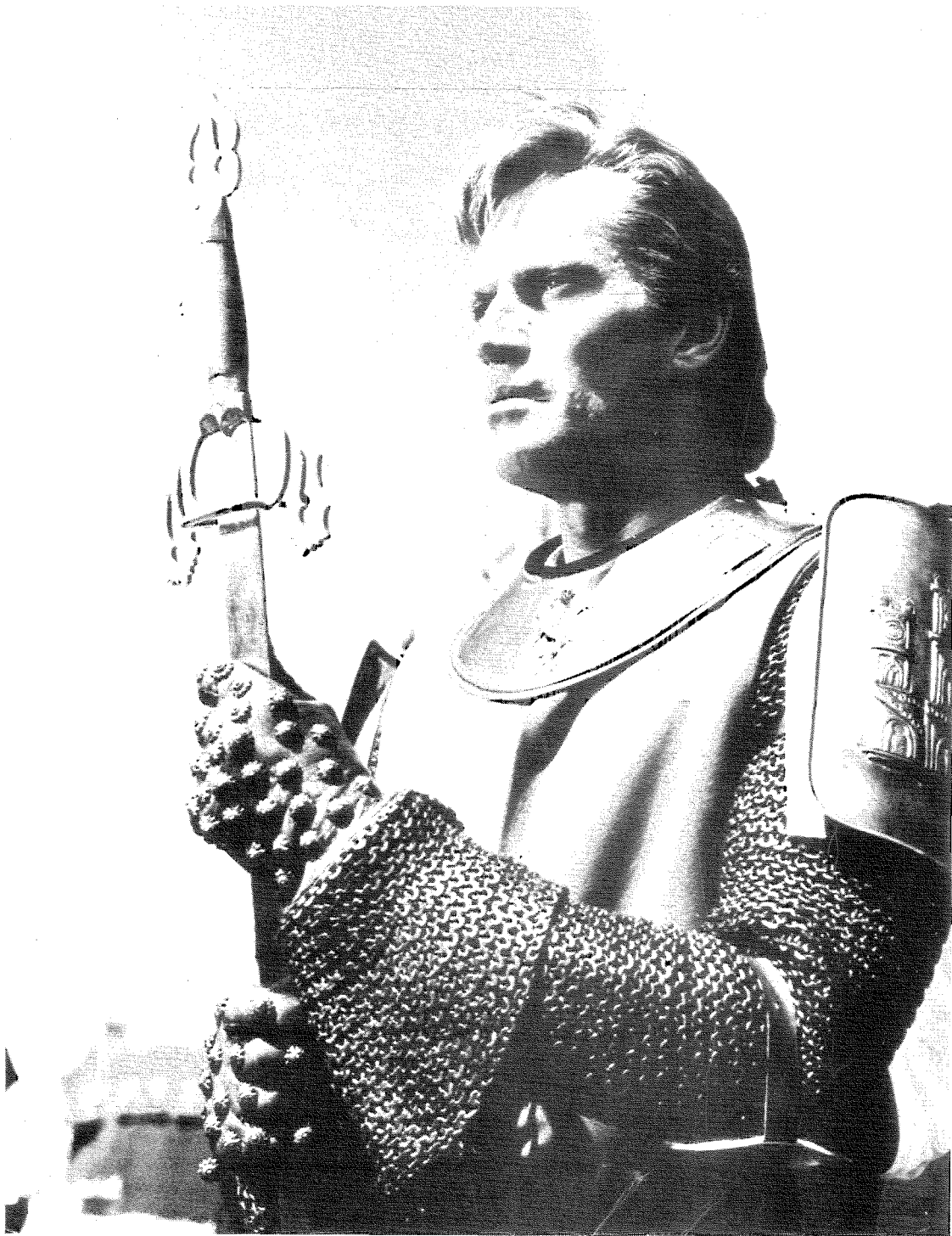
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<sup>1</sup> Laura Mulvey,  
'Visual Pleasure  
and Narrative  
Cinema', *Screen*  
Autumn 1975, vol  
16 no 3, pp 6-18.

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OVER THE PAST ten years or so, numerous books and articles have appeared discussing the images of women produced and circulated by the cinematic institution. Motivated politically by the development of the Women's Movement, and concerned therefore with the political and ideological implications of the representations of women offered by the cinema, a number of these books and articles have taken as their basis Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', first published in *Screen* in 1975<sup>1</sup>. Mulvey's article was highly influential in its linking together of psychoanalytic perspectives on the cinema with a feminist perspective on the ways in which images of women figure within mainstream film. She sought to demonstrate the extent to which the psychic mechanisms cinema has basically involved are profoundly patriarchal, and the extent to which the images of women mainstream film has produced lie at the heart of those mechanisms.

Inasmuch as there has been discussion of gender, sexuality, representation and the cinema over the past decade then, that discussion has tended overwhelmingly to centre on the representation of women, and to derive many of its basic tenets from Mulvey's article. Only within the Gay Movement have there appeared specific discussions of the representation of men. Most of these, as far as I am aware, have centred on the representations and stereotypes of gay men. Both within the Women's Movement and the Gay Movement, there is an important sense in which the images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscussed. Heterosexual masculinity has been identified as a structuring norm in relation both to images of women and gay men. It has to that extent been profoundly problematised, rendered visible. But it has rarely been discussed and analysed as such. Outside



'The more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego': *El Cid*.



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- <sup>2</sup> Pam Cook, 'Masculinity in Crisis?', *Screen* Sept/Oct 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, pp 39-46; Steve Neale, 'Chariots of Fire, Images of Men', *ibid*, pp 47-53; John Caughie and Gillian Skirrow, 'Ahab Ishmael... and Mo', *ibid*, pp 54-59; Tania Modleski, 'Film Theory's Detour', *Screen* Nov/Dec 1982, Vol 23 no 5, pp 72-79.
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- <sup>3</sup> Paul Willemsen, 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male', *Framework* 15/16/17, Summer 1981.
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- <sup>4</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Le Blocage Symbolique', *Communications* no 23, Paris 1975.
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- <sup>5</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.
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these movements, it has been discussed even less. It is thus very rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail, in relation to particular films or groups of films, how heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures and contradictions that inscription may involve. Aside from a number of recent pieces in *Screen*<sup>2</sup> and *Framework*<sup>3</sup>, Raymond Bellour's article on *North by Northwest* is the only example that springs readily to mind. Bellour's article follows in some detail the Oedipal trajectory of Hitchcock's film, tracing the movement of its protagonist, Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) from a position of infantile dependence on the mother to a position of 'adult', 'male', heterosexual masculinity, sealed by his marriage to Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint) and by his acceptance of the role and authority of the father. However, the article is concerned as much with the general workings of a classical Hollywood film as it is with the specifics of a set of images of masculinity.<sup>4</sup>

Although, then, there is a real need for more analyses of individual films, I intend in this article to take another approach to some of the issues involved. Using Laura Mulvey's article as a central, structuring reference point, I want to look in particular at identification, looking and spectacle as she has discussed them and to pose some questions as to how her remarks apply directly or indirectly to images of men, on the one hand, and to the male spectator on the other. The aim is less to challenge fundamentally the theses she puts forward, than to open a space within the framework of her arguments and remarks for a consideration of the representation of masculinity as it can be said to relate to the basic characteristics and conventions of the cinematic institution.

## IDENTIFICATION

To start with, I want to quote from John Ellis' book *Visible Fictions*<sup>5</sup>. Written very much in the light of Mulvey's article, Ellis is concerned both to draw on her arguments and to extend and qualify some of the theses she puts forward *vis-à-vis* gender and identification in the cinema. Ellis argues that identification is never simply a matter of men identifying with male figures on the screen and women identifying with female figures. Cinema draws on and involves many desires, many forms of desire. And desire itself is mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions and roles. Identifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory. Moreover, there are different forms of identification. Ellis points to two such forms, one associated with narcissism, the other with phantasies and dreams. He sums up as follows:

*Cinematic identification involves two different tendencies. First, there is that of dreaming and phantasy that involve the multiple and contradictory tendencies within the construction of the individual. Second, there is the experience of narcissistic identification with the image of a human figure perceived as other. Both these processes are invoked in the conditions of enter-*

tainment cinema. The spectator does not therefore 'identify' with the hero or heroine: an identification that would, if put in its conventional sense, involve socially constructed males identifying with male heroes, and socially constructed females identifying with women heroines. The situation is more complex than this, as identification involves both the recognition of self in the image on the screen, a narcissistic identification, and the identification of self with the various positions that are involved in the fictional narration: those of hero and heroine, villain, bit-part player, active and passive character. Identification is therefore multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche paraded before her or him;<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p 43.

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<sup>7</sup> Laura Mulvey, *op cit*, p 12.

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A series of identifications are involved, then, each shifting and mobile. Equally, though, there is constant work to channel and regulate identification in relation to sexual division, in relation to the orders of gender, sexuality and social identity and authority marking patriarchal society. Every film tends both to assume and actively to work to renew those orders, that division. Every film thus tends to specify identification in accordance with the socially defined and constructed categories of male and female.

In looking specifically at masculinity in this context, I want to examine the process of narcissistic identification in more detail. Inasmuch as films *do* involve gender identification, and inasmuch as current ideologies of masculinity involve so centrally notions and attitudes to do with aggression, power and control, it seems to me that narcissism and narcissistic identification may be especially significant.

Narcissism and narcissistic identification both involve phantasies of power, omnipotence, mastery and control. Laura Mulvey makes the link between such phantasies and patriarchal images of masculinity in the following terms:

*As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of his gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror.<sup>7</sup>*

I want to turn to Mulvey's remarks about the glamorous male movie star below. But first it is worth extending and illustrating her point about the male protagonist and the extent to which his image is dependent upon narcissistic phantasies, phantasies of the 'more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego'.

It is easy enough to find examples of films in which these phantasies are heavily prevalent, in which the male hero is powerful and omnipotent to an extraordinary degree: the Clint Eastwood character in *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, the Tom Mix westerns, Charlton Heston in *El Cid*, the *Mad Max*



films, the Steve Reeves epics, *Superman*, *Flash Gordon* and so on. There is generally, of course, a drama in which that power and omnipotence are tested and qualified (*Superman 2* is a particularly interesting example) as are Howard Hawks' westerns and adventure films), but the Leone trilogy, for example, is marked by the extent to which the hero's powers are rendered almost godlike, hardly qualified at all. Hence, perhaps, the extent to which they are built around ritualised scenes which in many ways are devoid of genuine suspense. A film like Melville's *Le Samourai*, on the other hand, starts with the image of self-possessed, omnipotent masculinity and traces its gradual and eventual disintegration. Alain Delon plays a lone gangster, a hit-man. His own narcissism is stressed in particular through his obsessive concern with his appearance, marked notably by a repeated and ritualised gesture he makes when putting on his hat, a sweep of the hand across the rim. Delon is sent on a job, but is spotted by a black female singer in a club. There is an exchange of looks.

From that point on his omnipotence, silence and inviolability are all under threat. He is shot and wounded; his room is broken into and bugged; he is nearly trapped on the Metro. Eventually, he is gunned down, having returned to the club to see the singer again. The film is by no means a critique of the male image it draws upon. On the contrary, it very much identifies (and invites us to identify) with Delon. Nevertheless, the elements both of that image and of that to which the image is vulnerable are clearly laid out. It is no accident that Delon's downfall is symptomatically inaugurated in his encounter with the black woman. Difference (double difference) is the threat. An exchange of looks in which Delon's cold commanding gaze is troubled, undermined and returned is the mark of that threat.

The kind of image that Delon here embodies, and that Eastwood and the others mentioned earlier embody too, is one marked not only by emotional reticence, but also by silence, a reticence with language. Theoretically, this silence, this absence of language can further be linked to narcissism and to the construction of an ideal ego. The acquisition of language is a process profoundly challenging to the narcissism of early childhood. It is productive of what has been called 'symbolic castration'. Language is a process (or set of processes) involving absence and lack, and these are what threaten any image of the self as totally enclosed, self-sufficient, omnipotent. The construction of an ideal ego, meanwhile, is a process involving profound contradictions. While the ideal ego may be a 'model' with which the subject identifies and to which it aspires, it may also be a source of further images and feelings of castration, inasmuch as that ideal is something to which the subject is never adequate.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For further elaboration of these two related points see Moustapha Safouan, 'Is the Oedipus Complex Universal?', *m/f* nos 5/6, 1981, pp 85-87.

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The cool gaze of the lone gangster: *Le Samourai*.

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<sup>9</sup> D N Rodowick, 'The Difficulty of Difference,' *Wide Angle*, vol 5 no 1, p 8.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Willemen, *op cit.*

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p 16.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

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If this is the case, there can be no simple and unproblematic identification on the part of the spectator, male or female, with Mulvey's 'ideal ego' on the screen. In an article published in *Wide Angle*, D N Rodowick has made a similar point. He goes on to argue both that the narcissistic male image – the image of authority and omnipotence – can entail a concomitant masochism in the relations between the spectator and the image, and further that the male image can involve an eroticism, since there is always a constant oscillation between that image as a source of identification, and as an other, a source of contemplation. The image is a source both of narcissistic processes and drives, and, inasmuch as it is other, of object-oriented processes and drives:

*Mulvey discusses the male star as an object of the look but denies him the function of an erotic object. Because Mulvey conceives the look to be essentially active in its aims, identification with the male protagonist is only considered from a point of view which associates it with a sense of omnipotence, of assuming control of the narrative. She makes no differentiation between identification and object choice in which sexual aims may be directed towards the male figure, nor does she consider the signification of authority in the male figure from the point of view of an economy of masochism.* <sup>9</sup>

Given Rodowick's argument, it is not surprising either that 'male' genres and films constantly involve sado-masochistic themes, scenes and phantasies or that male heroes can at times be marked as the object of an erotic gaze. These are both points I wish to discuss below. However, it is worth mentioning here that they have also been discussed in Paul Willemen's article 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male'.<sup>10</sup>

Willemen argues that spectacle and drama in Mann's films tend both to be structured around the look at the male figure: 'The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male "exist" (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes or, more abstractly, history. And on the unquiet pleasure of seeing the male mutilated (often quite graphically in Mann) and restored through violent brutality.'<sup>11</sup> These pleasures are founded upon a repressed homosexual voyeurism, a voyeurism 'not without its problems: the look at the male produces just as much anxiety as the look at the female, especially when it's presented as directly as in the killing scenes in *T-Men* and *Border Incident*.'<sup>12</sup> The (unstated) thesis behind these comments seems to be that in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. The mutilation and sadism so often involved in Mann's films are marks both of the repression involved and of a means by which the male body may be disqualified, so to speak, as an object of erotic contemplation and desire. The repression and disavowal involved are figured crucially in the scenes in *T-Men* and *Border Incident* to which Willemen refers, in which 'an undercover agent must look on, impassively, while his close (male) friend and partner is being killed'.<sup>13</sup>



There is one final and important contradiction involved in the type of narcissistic images of masculinity discussed above to which I'd like to refer. It is the contradiction between narcissism and the Law, between an image of *narcissistic* authority on the one hand and an image of *social* authority on the other. This tension or contradiction is discussed at some length by Laura Mulvey in an article seeking to re-consider her 'Visual Pleasure' piece with particular reference to *Duel in the Sun*.<sup>14</sup> It is a tension she sees as especially evident in the western. Using a narrative model derived from Vladimir's Propp's analyses of folktales<sup>15</sup>, Mulvey points to two narrative functions, 'marriage' (and hence social integration) and 'not marriage', a refusal by the hero to enter society, a refusal motivated by a nostalgic narcissism:

*In the Proppian tale, an important aspect of narrative closure is 'marriage', a function characterised by the 'princess' or equivalent. This is the only function that is sex specific and thus essentially relates to the sex of the hero and his marriageability. This function is very commonly reproduced in the Western, where once again 'marriage' makes a crucial contribution to narrative closure. However, the function's presence also has come to allow a complication in the Western, its complementary opposite 'not marriage'. Thus, while the social integration represented by marriage is an essential aspect of the folk-tale, in the Western it can be accepted... or not. A hero can gain in stature by refusing the princess and remaining alone (Randolph Scott in the Ranown series of movies). As the resolution of the Proppian tale can be seen to represent the resolution of the Oedipus complex (integration into the symbolic), the rejection of marriage personifies a nostalgic celebration of phallic, narcissistic omnipotence.*<sup>16</sup>

There are thus two diverging images of masculinity commonly at play in the western:

*The tension between two points of attraction, the symbolic (social integration and marriage) and nostalgic narcissism, generates a common splitting of the Western hero into two, something unknown in the Proppian tale. Here two functions emerge, one celebrating integration into society through marriage, the other celebrating resistance to social standards and responsibilities, above all those of marriage and the family, the sphere represented by women.*<sup>17</sup>

Mulvey goes on to discuss John Ford's western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, noting the split there between Tom Doniphon, played by John Wayne, who incarnates the narcissistic function of the anachronistic social outsider, and Ranse Stoddart, played by James Stewart, who incarnates the civilising functions of marriage, social integration and social responsibility. The film's tone is increasingly nostalgic, in keeping with its mourning for the loss of Doniphon and what he represents. The nostalgia, then, is not just for an historical past, for the Old West, but also for the masculine narcissism that Wayne represents.

Taking a cue from Mulvey's remarks about nostalgia in *Liberty Valance*, one could go on to discuss a number of nostalgic westerns in

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<sup>14</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts... Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Framework* 15/16/17, Summer 1981.

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<sup>15</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, University of Texas Press, 1968.

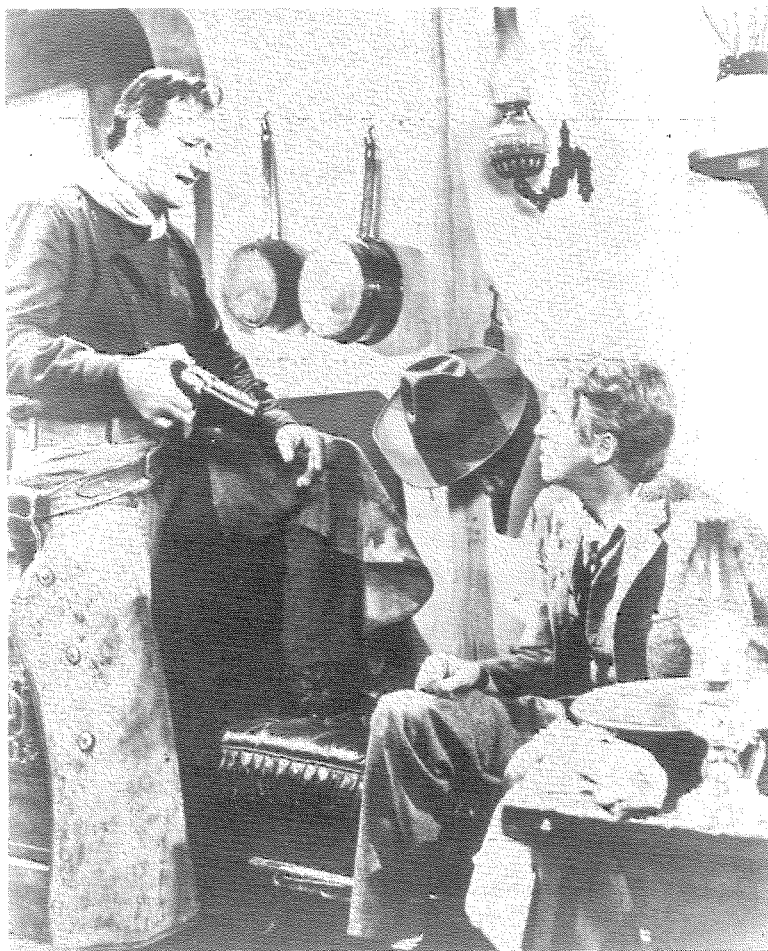
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<sup>16</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts... Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', op cit, p 14.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p 18.

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The outsider and the civiliser: John Wayne and James Stewart in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

these terms, in terms of the theme of lost or doomed male narcissism. The clearest examples would be Peckinpah's westerns: *Guns in the Afternoon*, *Major Dundee* (to a lesser extent), *The Wild Bunch* and, especially, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. These films are shot through with nostalgia, with an obsession with images and definitions of masculinity and masculine codes of behaviour, and with images of male narcissism and the threats posed to it by women, society and the Law. The threat of castration is figured in the wounds and injuries suffered by Joel McCrea in *Guns in the Afternoon*, Charlton Heston in *Major Dundee* and William Holden in *The Wild Bunch*. The famous slow-motion violence, bodies splintered and torn apart, can be viewed at one level at least as the image of narcissism in its moment of disintegration and destruction. Significantly, Kris Kristofferson as Billy in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the ultimate incarnation of omnipotent male narcissism in Peckinpah's films, is spared any bloody and splintered death. Shot by Pat Garrett, his body shows no sign either of wounds or blood: narcissism transfigured (rather than destroyed) by death.



Male narcissism  
transfigured by  
death: *Pat Garrett*  
and *Billy the Kid*.

I want now to move on from identification and narcissism to discuss in relation to images of men and masculinity the two modes of looking addressed by Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure', voyeuristic looking, on the one hand, and fetishistic looking on the other.

## LOOKING AND SPECTACLE

In discussing these two types of looking, both fundamental to the cinema, Mulvey locates them solely in relation to a structure of activity/passivity in which the look is male and active and the object of the look female and passive. Both are considered as distinct and variant means by which male castration anxieties may be played out and allayed.

Voyeuristic looking is marked by the extent to which there is a distance between spectator and spectacle, a gulf between the seer and the seen. This structure is one which allows the spectator a degree of power over what is seen. It hence tends constantly to involve sado-masochistic

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<sup>18</sup> Laura Mulvey,  
'Visual Pleasure  
and Narrative  
Cinema', op cit, p  
14.

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phantasies and themes. Here is Mulvey's description:

*voyeurism... has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment and forgiveness. This sadistic side fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory and defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end.*<sup>18</sup>

Mulvey goes on to discuss these characteristics of voyeuristic looking in terms of the *film noir* and of Hitchcock's movies, where the hero is the bearer of the voyeuristic look, engaged in a narrative in which the woman is the object of its sadistic components. However, if we take some of the terms used in her description – 'making something happen', 'forcing a change in another person', 'a battle of will and strength', 'victory and defeat' – they can immediately be applied to 'male' genres, to films concerned largely or solely with the depiction of relations between men, to any film, for example, in which there is a struggle between a hero and a male villain. War films, westerns and gangster movies, for instance, are all marked by 'action', by 'making something happen'. Battles, fights and duels of all kinds are concerned with struggles of 'will and strength', 'victory and defeat', between individual men and/or groups of men. All of which implies that male figures on the screen are subject to voyeuristic looking, both on the part of the spectator and on the part of other male characters.

Paul Willeman's thesis on the films of Anthony Mann is clearly relevant here. The repression of any explicit avowal of eroticism in the act of looking at the male seems structurally linked to a narrative content marked by sado-masochistic phantasies and scenes. Hence both forms of voyeuristic looking, intra- and extra-diegetic, are especially evident in those moments of contest and combat referred to above, in those moments at which a narrative outcome is determined through a fight or gun-battle, at which male struggle becomes pure spectacle. Perhaps the most extreme examples are to be found in Leone's westerns, where the exchange of aggressive looks marking most western gun-duels is taken to the point of fetishistic parody through the use of extreme and repetitive close-ups. At which point the look begins to oscillate between voyeurism and fetishism as the narrative starts to freeze and spectacle takes over. The anxious 'aspects' of the look at the male to which Willeman refers are here both embodied and allayed not just by playing out the sadism inherent in voyeurism through scenes of violence and combat, but also by drawing upon the structures and processes of fetishistic looking, by stopping the narrative in order to recognise the pleasure of display, but displacing it from the male body as such and locating it more generally in the overall components of a highly ritualised scene.

John Ellis has characterised fetishistic looking in the following terms:

where voyeurism maintains (depends upon) a separation between the seer and the object seen, fetishism tries to abolish the gulf. . . . This process implies a different position and attitude of the spectator to the image. It represents the opposite tendency to that of voyeurism. . . . Fetishistic looking implies the direct acknowledgement and participation of the object viewed. . . . with the fetishistic attitude, the look of the character towards the viewer. . . is a central feature. . . . The voyeuristic look is curious, inquiring, demanding to know. The fetishistic gaze is captivated by what it sees, does not wish to inquire further, to see more, to find out. . . . The fetishistic look has much to do with display and the spectacular.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John Ellis, op cit, p 47.

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<sup>20</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', op cit, p 14.

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'Direct erotic rapport with the spectator':  
Dierich in  
Sternberg's *Blonde Venus*.

Mulvey again centrally discusses this form of looking in relation to the female as object: 'This second avenue, fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself.'<sup>20</sup> 'Physical beauty' is interpreted solely in terms of the

female body. It is specified through the example of the films of Sternberg:

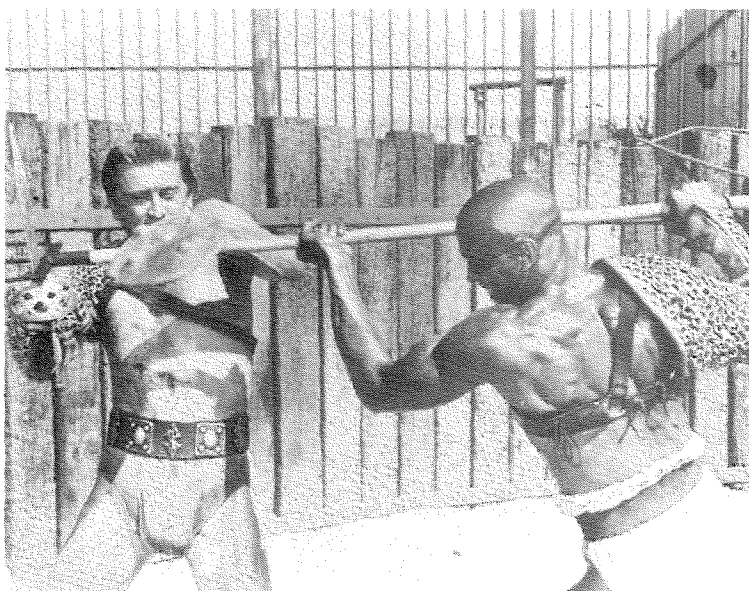
*While Hitchcock goes into the investigative side of voyeurism, Sternberg produces the ultimate fetish, taking it to the point where the powerful look of the male protagonist is broken in favour of the image in direct erotic rapport with the spectator. The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look.<sup>21</sup>*

If we return to Leone's shoot-outs, we can see that some elements of the fetishistic look as here described are present, others not. We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display. There is no trace of an acknowledgement or recognition of those bodies as displayed solely for the gaze of the spectator. They are on display, certainly, but there is no cultural or cinematic convention which would allow the male body to be presented in the way that Dietrich so often is in Sternberg's films. We see male bodies stylised and fragmented by close-ups, but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. And those looks are marked not by desire, but rather by fear, or hatred, or aggression. The shoot-outs are moments of spectacle, points at which the narrative hesitates, comes to a momentary halt, but they are also points at which the drama is finally resolved, a suspense in the culmination of the narrative drive. They thus involve an imbrication of *both* forms of looking, their intertwining designed to minimise and displace the eroticism they each tend to involve, to disavow any explicitly erotic look at the male body.

There are other instances of male combat which seem to function in this way. Aside from the western, one could point to the epic as a genre, to the gladiatorial combat in *Spartacus*, to the fight between Christopher Plummer and Stephen Boyd at the end of *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, to the chariot race in *Ben Hur*. More direct displays of the male body can be found, though they tend either to be fairly brief or else to occupy the screen during credit sequences and the like (in which case the display is mediated by another textual function). Examples of the former would include the extraordinary shot of Gary Cooper lying under the hut toward the end of *Man of the West*, his body momentarily filling the Cinemascope screen. Or some of the images of Lee Marvin in *Point Blank*, his body draped over a railing or framed in a doorway. Examples of the latter would include the credit sequence of *Man of the West* again (an example to which Willemsen refers), and *Junior Bonner*.

The presentation of Rock Hudson in Sirk's melodramas is a particularly interesting case. There are constantly moments in these films in which Hudson is presented quite explicitly as the object of an erotic look. The look is usually marked as female. But Hudson's body is *feminised* in those moments, an indication of the strength of those conventions which dictate that only women can function as the objects of an explicit-

ly erotic gaze. Such instances of 'feminisation' tend also to occur in the musical, the only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display in mainstream cinema in any consistent way. (A particularly clear and interesting example would be the presentation of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*.)



The displaced eroticism of male bodies in combat: *Spartacus*.

It is a refusal to acknowledge or make explicit an eroticism that marks all three of the psychic functions and processes discussed here in relation to images of men: identification, voyeuristic looking and fetishistic looking. It is this that tends above all to differentiate the cinematic representation of images of men and women. Although I have sought to open up a space within Laura Mulvey's arguments and theses, to argue that the elements she considers in relation to images of women can and should also be considered in relation to images of men, I would certainly concur with her basic premise that the spectatorial look in mainstream cinema is implicitly male: it is one of the fundamental reasons why the erotic elements involved in the relations between the spectator and the male image have constantly to be repressed and disavowed. Were this not the case, mainstream cinema would have openly to come to terms with the male homosexuality it so assiduously seeks either to denigrate or deny. As it is, male homosexuality is constantly present as an undercurrent, as a potentially troubling aspect of many films and genres, but one that is dealt with obliquely, symptomatically, and that has to be repressed. While mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male image in the same kind of way: women are a problem, a source of





Unashamedly on display: John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*.

anxiety, of obsessive enquiry; men are not. Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery. This is one of the reasons why the representation of masculinity, both inside and outside the cinema, has been so rarely discussed. Hopefully, this article will contribute towards such a discussion.

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I would like to thank John Ellis and Andrew Higson for their comments on an earlier draft of this article, which is based on a talk given during the course of a SEFT Day Event on Masculinity held at Four Corners Film Workshop, London, March 19, 1983.

# Womens Film, Television & Video Network

79 Wardour St London W13PH 01 434 2076

The ultimate aim of WFTVN is the positive, representative and realistic portrayal of women in film, TV and video.

WFTVN believes that to achieve this aim women themselves must be involved & employed at all stages of production.

WFTVN is in the process of developing & running an effective advice & information service which will encourage access, participation & employment of women in these media.

WFTVN is producing Information Sheets on topics ranging from Sympathetic Training Courses to Where To Hire Equipment to Relevant Trade Unions.

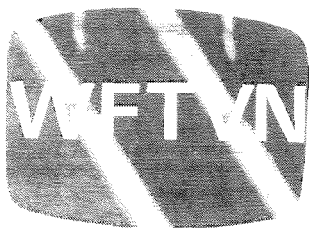
WFTVN is writing familiarisation sheets describing exactly what is involved in being a Camerawoman, Assistant Editor, Production Manager etc.

WFTVN is sending out a Questionnaire from which we will compile a Register listing both women with and wanting skills & experience so people can no longer say 'didn't know there were any women sound recordists/vision mixers etc.' 'It will also provide a network for women wishing to contact other women.

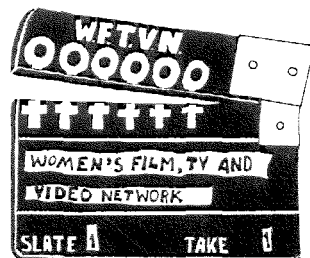
WFTVN is new and not rich. We would be pleased if people would send us any material appropriate for our information gathering (eg, about training courses, women's media groups, equipment etc) & put us on relevant mailing lists.

**Questionnaire:** Send SAE to address above if you want one to fill in.

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# THE OTHER QUESTION . . .

## HOMI K BHABHA RECONSIDERS THE STEREOTYPE AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE

<sup>1</sup> There are two major problems with this account which emphasise the tentative and introductory nature of the essay. First, despite the subject's problematic accession to sexual difference which is crucial to my argument, the body in this text is male. Realising that the question of woman's relation to castration and access to the symbolic requires a very specific form of attention and articulation, I chose to be cautious till I had worked out its implications for colonial discourse. Secondly, the representation of class difference in the construction of the colonial subject is not specified adequately. Wanting to avoid any form of class determinism 'in the last instance' it becomes difficult, if crucial, to calculate its effectivity. I hope

*To concern oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy, to deconstitute them, is not to undertake the work of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy. Despite appearances, it is probably the most daring way of making the beginnings of a step outside of philosophy.*

Jacques Derrida: *Structure, Sign and Play*

AN IMPORTANT FEATURE of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness.<sup>1</sup> Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. It is this process of *ambivalence*, central to the stereotype, that my essay explores as it constructs a theory of colonial discourse. For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet, the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power – whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan – remains to be charted.

The absence of such a perspective has its own history of political expediency. To recognise the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics, and questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination. My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the *identification* of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. To judge the stereotyped

image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its *effectivity*; with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs the colonial subject (both coloniser and colonised). I do not intend to deconstruct the colonial discourse to reveal its ideological misconceptions or repressions, to exult in its self-reflexivity, or to indulge its liberatory 'excess'. In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of 'truth', not to subject its representations to a normalising judgement. Only then does it become possible to understand the *productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity. What such a reading reveals are the boundaries of colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of that otherness.

The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power. I do not wish to conflate, unproblematically, two forms of the marking—and splitting—of the subject nor to globalise two forms of representation. I want to suggest, however, that there is a theoretical space and a political place for such an *articulation*—in the sense in which that word itself denies an 'original' identity or a 'singularity' to objects of difference—sexual or racial. If such a view is taken, as Feuchtwang<sup>2</sup> argues in a different context, it follows that the epithets racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects. Such is, I believe, the moment of colonial discourse. It is the most theoretically underdeveloped form of discourse, but crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation.

Before turning to the construction of colonial discourse, I want to discuss briefly the process by which forms of racial/cultural/historical otherness have been marginalised in theoretical texts committed to the articulation of 'difference', '*significance*', 'contradiction', in order, it is claimed, to reveal the limits of Western representationalist discourse. In facilitating the passage 'from work to text' and stressing the arbitrary, differential and systemic construction of social and cultural signs, these critical strategies unsettle the idealist quest for meanings that are, most often, intentionalist and nationalist. So much is not in question. What does need to be questioned, however, is the *mode of representation of otherness*.

Where better to raise the question of the subject of racial and cultural difference than in Stephen Heath's masterly analysis of the chiaroscuro world of Welles' classic *A Touch of Evil*? I refer to an area of its analysis

to face both these issues more fully in the book that I am working on at present: *Power and Spectacle: 'Colonial Discourse and the English Novel*, to be published by Methuen.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, 'Socialist, Feminist and Anti-racist Struggles', *m/f* 4, 1980, p 41.

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The chiaroscuro world of racial and sexual difference: *A Touch of Evil*.

which has generated the least comment, that is, Heath's attention to the structuration of the border Mexico/USA that circulates through the text affirming and exchanging some notion of 'limited being'. Heath's work departs from the traditional analysis of racial and cultural differences, which identify stereotype and image, and elaborate them in a moralistic or nationalistic discourse that affirms the *origin* and *unity* of national identity. Heath's attentiveness to the contradictory and diverse sites within the textual system, which *construct* national/cultural differences in their deployment of the semes of 'foreignness', 'mixedness', 'impurity', as transgressive and corrupting, is extremely relevant. His attention to the turnings of this much neglected subject as sign (not symbol or stereotype) disseminated in the codes (as 'partition', 'exchange', 'naming', 'character', etc.), gives us a useful sense of the circulation and proliferation of racial and cultural otherness. Despite the awareness of the multiple or cross-cutting determinations in the construction of modes of sexual and racial differentiation there is a sense in which Heath's analysis marginalises otherness. Although I shall argue that the problem of the border Mexico/USA is read too singularly, too exclusively under the sign of sexuality, it is not that I am not aware of the many proper and relevant reasons for that 'feminist' focus. The 'entertainment' operated by the realist Hollywood film of the '50s was always also a containment of the subject in a narrative economy of voyeurism and fetishism. Moreover, the displacement that organises any textual system, within which the display of difference circulates, demands that the play of 'nationalities' should participate in the sexual positioning, troubling the Law and desire. There is, nevertheless, a singularity and reductiveness in concluding that:

*Vargas is the position of desire, its admission and its prohibition. Not surprisingly he has two names: the name of desire is Mexican, Miguel . . . that of the Law American – Mike . . . The film uses the border, the play between American and Mexican . . . at the same time it seeks to hold that play finally in the opposition of purity and mixture which in turn is a version of Law and desire.*<sup>3</sup>

However liberatory it is from one position to see the logic of the text traced ceaselessly between the Ideal Father and the Phallic Mother, in another sense, in seeing only one possible articulation of the differential complex 'race-sex' – it half colludes with the proffered images of marginality. For if the naming of Vargas is crucially mixed and split in the economy of desire, then there are other mixed economies which make naming and positioning equally problematic 'across the border'. To identify the 'play' on the border as purity and mixture and to see it as an allegory of Law and desire reduces the articulation of racial and sexual difference to what is dangerously close to becoming a circle rather than a spiral of *différance*. On that basis, it is not possible to construct the polymorphous and perverse collusion between racism and sexism as a *mixed economy* – for instance, the discourses of American cultural colonialism

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Film and System, Terms of Analysis', Part II, *Screen Summer* 1975, vol 16, no 2, p 93.

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and Mexican dependency, the fear/desire of miscegenation, the American border as cultural signifier of a pioneering, male 'American' spirit always under threat from races and cultures beyond the border. If the death of the Father is the interruption on which the narrative is initiated, it is through that death that miscegenation is both possible and deferred; if, again, it is the purpose of the narrative to restore Susan as 'good object', it also becomes its project to deliver Vargas from his racial 'mixedness'. It is all there in Heath's splendid scrutiny of the text, revealed as he brushes against its grain. What is missing is the taking up of these positions as also the *object(ives)* of his analysis.

These objectives have been pursued in the January/February 1983 issue of *Screen* (volume 24, number 2), which addresses the problems of 'Racism, Colonialism and Cinema'. This is a timely and welcome intervention in the debate on realist narrative and its conditions of existence and representability – a debate which has hitherto engaged mainly with the 'subject' of gender and class within the social and textual formations of western bourgeois society. It would be inappropriate to review this issue of *Screen* here, but I would like to draw attention to Julianne Burton's 'The Politics of Aesthetic Distance: The Presentation of Representation in "Sao Bernardo"'. Burton produces an interesting reading of Hirzman's *São Bernardo* as a specific Third World riposte of dualistic metropolitan debates around realism and the possibilities of rupture. Although she doesn't use Barthes, it would be accurate to say that she locates the film as the 'limit-text' of both its own totalitarian social context *as well as* contemporary theoretical debates on representation.

Again, anti-colonialist objectives are admirably taken up by Robert Stam and Louise Spence in 'Colonialism, Racism and Representation', with a useful Brechtian emphasis on the politicisation of the *means* of representation, specifically point-of-view and suture. But despite the shift in political objectives and critical methods, there remains in their essay a limiting and traditional reliance on the stereotype as offering, *at any one time*, a *secure* point of identification. This is not compensated for (nor contradicted by) their view that, *at other times and places*, the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way or, indeed, be misread. What is, therefore, a simplification in the process of stereotypical representation has a knock-on effect on their central point about the politics of point-of-view. They operate a passive and unitary notion of suture which simplifies the politics and 'aesthetics' of spectator-positioning by ignoring the ambivalent, psychical process of identification which is crucial to the argument. In contrast I suggest, in a very preliminary way, that the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.

The difference of other cultures is other than the excess of signification or the trajectory of desire. These are theoretical strategies that are necessary to combat 'ethnocentrism' but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness. There can be no inevitable



sliding from the semiotic activity to the unproblematic reading of other cultural and discursive systems.<sup>4</sup> There is in such readings a will to power and knowledge that, in failing to specify the limits of their own field of enunciation and effectivity, proceeds to individualise otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions.

## II

The difference of colonial discourse as an apparatus of power<sup>5</sup> will emerge more fully as the paper develops. At this stage, however, I shall provide what I take to be the minimum conditions and specifications of such a discourse. It is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledges of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and the shifting positionalities of its subjects (e.g. effects of class, gender, ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonisation etc), I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity. Therefore, despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognisable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to Realism. And it is in order to intervene within that system of representation that Edward Said proposes a semiotic of 'Orientalist' power, examining the varied European discourses which constitute 'the Orient' as an unified racial, geographical, political and cultural zone of the world. Said's analysis is revealing of, and relevant to, colonial discourse:

*'Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. . . . The tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of*

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, having decentred the sign, Barthes finds Japan immediately insightful and visible and extends the empire of empty signs universally. Japan can only be the Anti-West: 'in the ideal Japanese house, devoid or nearly so of furniture, there is no place which in any way designates property; no seat, no bed, no table provides a point from which the body may constitute itself as subject (or master) of a space. The very concept of centre is rejected (burning frustration for Western man everywhere provided with his armchair and his bed, the owner of a domestic position).'- Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des Signes*, translated by Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, London, Scholar Press 1979, pp 13-14. For a reading of Kristeva relevant to my argument, see Gayatri Spivak, 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Studies* 62; 1981, pp 154-184.

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<sup>5</sup> This concept is discussed below.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978, p 72.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 206.

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*repetition and strength. . . . For all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple copula is.*<sup>6</sup> (my emphasis)

For Said, the *copula* seems to be the point at which Western Rationalism preserves the boundaries of sense for itself. Of this, too, Said is aware when he hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of Orientalism.<sup>7</sup> It is, on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements. It is a static system of 'synchronic essentialism', a knowledge of 'signifiers of stability' such as the lexicographic and the encyclopaedic. However, this site is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability. And, finally, this line of thinking is given a shape analogical to the dream-work, when Said refers explicitly to a distinction between 'an unconscious positivity' which he terms *latent* Orientalism, and the stated knowledges and views about the Orient which he calls *manifest* Orientalism.

Where the originality of this pioneering theory loses its inventiveness, and for me its usefulness, is with Said's reluctance to engage with the alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of these two economies which threaten to split the very object of Orientalist discourse as a knowledge and the subject positioned therein. He contains this threat by introducing a binarism within the argument which, in initially setting up an opposition these two discursive scenes, finally allows them to be correlated as a congruent system of representation that is unified through a political-ideological *intention* which, in his words, enables Europe to advance securely and *unmetaphorically* upon the Orient. Said identifies the *content* of Orientalism as the unconscious repository of fantasy, imaginative writings and essential ideas; and the *form* of manifest Orientalism as the historically and discursively determined, diachronic aspect. This division/correlation structure of manifest and latent Orientalism leads to the effectivity of the concept of discourse being undermined by what could be called the polarities of intentionality.

This produces a problem with Said's use of Foucault's concepts of power and discourse. The productivity of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge lies in its refusal of an epistemology which opposes essence/appearance, ideology/science. '*Pouvoir/Savoir*' places subjects in a relation of power and recognition that is not part of a symmetrical or dialectical relation – self/other, Master/Slave – which can then be subverted by being inverted. Subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentering of multiple power-relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary. It becomes difficult, then, to conceive of the *historical* enunciations of colonial discourse without them being either functionally overdetermined or strategically elaborated or displaced by the *unconscious* scene of latent Orientalism. Equally, it is difficult to conceive of the process of subjectification as a placing *within* Orientalist or colonial discourse for

the dominated subject without the dominant being strategically placed within it too. There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification. The terms in which Said's Orientalism is unified – the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power – also unify the subject of colonial enunciation.

This is a result of Said's inadequate attention to representation as a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy (as the scene of desire) in the production of the 'political' effects of discourse. He rightly rejects a notion of orientalism as the misrepresentation of an Oriental essence. However, having introduced the concept of 'discourse' he does not face up to the problems it makes for the instrumentalist notion of power/knowledge that he seems to require. This problem is summed up by his ready acceptance of the view that,

*Representations are formations, or as Roland Barthes has said of all the operations of language, they are deformations.*<sup>8</sup>

This brings me to my second point – that the closure and coherence attributed to the unconscious pole of colonial discourse and the unproblematised notion of the subject, restricts the effectivity of both power and knowledge. It is not possible to see how power functions productively as incitement and interdiction. Nor would it be possible, without the attribution of ambivalence to relations of power/knowledge, to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed – those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts. It is precisely this function of the stereotype as phobia and fetish that, according to Fanon, threatens the closure of the racial/epidermal schema for the colonial subject and opens the royal road to colonial fantasy.

Despite Said's limitations, or perhaps because of them, there is a forgotten, underdeveloped passage which, in cutting across the body of the text, articulates the question of power and desire that I now want to take up. It is this:

*Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West. What gives the immense number of encounters some unity, however, is the vacillation I was speaking about earlier. Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method*

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp 58-59.

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge*, Harvester, London, 1980, p 196.

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p 195.

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*of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things. . . . The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either 'original' or 'repetitious'. . . . The orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty.<sup>9</sup>*

What is this other scene of colonial discourse played out around the 'median category'? What is this theory of encapsulation or fixation which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear? Is it not analogous to the Freudian fable of fetishism (and disavowal) that circulates within the discourse of colonial power, requiring the articulation of modes of differentiation – sexual and racial – as well as different modes of discourse – psychoanalytic and historical?

The strategic articulation of 'coordinates of knowledge' – racial and sexual – and their inscription in the play of colonial power as modes of differentiation, defense, fixation, hierarchisation, is a way of specifying colonial discourse which would be illuminated by reference to Foucault's post-structuralist concept of the *dispositif* or apparatus. Foucault stresses that the relations of knowledge and power within the apparatus are always a strategic response to an *urgent need* at a given historical moment – much as I suggested at the outset, that the force of colonial discourse as a theoretical and political intervention, was the *need*, in our contemporary moment, to contest singularities of difference and to articulate modes of differentiation. Foucault writes:

*. . . the apparatus is essentially of a strategic nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by, types of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>*

In this spirit I argue for the reading of the stereotype in terms of fetishism. The myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – produced in relation to the colonial stereotype functions to 'normalise' the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal. The scene of fetishism functions similarly as, at once, a reactivation of the material of original fantasy – the anxiety of castration and sexual difference – as well as a normalisation of that difference and disturbance in terms of the fetish object as the substitute for the mother's penis. Within the apparatus of colonial power, the discourses of sexuality and race relate in a process of *functional overdetermination*, 'because each effect . . . enters into resonance or contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a readjustment or a reworking of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points.'<sup>11</sup>

There is both a structural and functional justification for reading the racial stereotype of colonial discourse in terms of fetishism.<sup>12</sup> My re-reading of Said establishes the *structural* link. Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference—as the pre-condition for the circulation of the chain of absence and presence in the realm of the Symbolic—is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence. The *functional* link between the fixation of the fetish and the stereotype (or the stereotype as fetish) is even more relevant. For fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud’s terms: ‘All men have penises’; in ours ‘All men have the same skin/race/culture’—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference—again, for Freud ‘Some do not have penises’; for us ‘Some do not have the same skin/race/culture’. Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack). The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy—the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division, for the subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken.

The stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both coloniser and colonised, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defence—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture. My contention is splendidly caught in Fanon’s title *Black Skin White Masks* where the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit—a grotesque mimicry or ‘doubling’ that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego. The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.

When Fanon talks of the positioning of the subject in the stereotyped discourse of colonialism, he gives further credence to my point. The legends, stories, histories and anecdotes of a colonial culture offer the subject a primordial Either/Or.<sup>13</sup> *Either* he is fixed in a consciousness of the body as a solely negating activity *or* as a new kind of man, a new genus. What is denied the colonial subject, both as coloniser and colonised is that form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference in the Symbolic. It is that possibility of difference and circulation which would liberate the signifier of *skin/culture* from the signifieds of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of racial and cultural

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<sup>12</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘Fetishism’ (1927) in *On Sexuality*, vol 7, Pelican Freud Library, Harmondsworth, 1981, p 345 ff; Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, Macmillan, London, 1982, pp 67-78. See also Steve Neale, ‘The Same Old Story: Stereotypes and Differences’, *Screen Education* 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp 33-37.

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<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, London, Paladin, 1970, see pp 78-82.

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dominance or degeneration. 'Wherever he goes', Fanon despairs, 'The Negro remains a Negro' – his race becomes the ineradicable sign of *negative difference* in colonial discourses. For the stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than its *fixity* as racism. We always already know that blacks are licentious, Asiatics duplicitous....

### III

There are two 'primal scenes' in Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks*: two myths of the origin of the marking of the subject within the racist practices and discourses of a colonial culture. On one occasion a white girl fixes Fanon in a look and word as she turns to identify with her mother. It is a scene which echoes endlessly through his essay *The Fact of Blackness*: 'Look, a Negro... Mamma, see the Negro! I'm frightened. Frightened. Frightened.' 'What else could it be for me', Fanon concludes, 'but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood.'<sup>14</sup> Equally, he stresses the primal moment when the child encounters racial and cultural stereotypes in children's fictions, where white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of ideological and psychical identification. Such dramas are enacted *every day* in colonial societies, says Fanon, employing a theatrical metaphor – the scene – which emphasises the visible – the seen. I want to play on both these senses which refer at once to the site of fantasy and desire and to the sight of subjectification and power.

The drama underlying these dramatic 'everyday' colonial scenes is not difficult to discern. In each of them the subject turns around the pivot of the 'stereotype' to return to a point of total identification. The girl's gaze returns to her mother in the recognition and disavowal of the Negroid type; the black child turns away from himself, his race, in his total identification with the positivity of whiteness which is at once colour and no colour. In the act of disavowal and fixation the colonial subject is returned to the narcissism of the Imaginary and its identification of an ideal ego that is white and whole. For what these primal scenes illustrate is that looking/hearing/reading as sites of subjectification in colonial discourse are evidence of the importance of the visual and auditory imaginary for the *histories* of societies.<sup>15</sup>

It is in this context that I want to allude briefly to the problematic of seeing/being seen. I suggest that in order to conceive of the colonial subject as the effect of power that is productive – disciplinary and 'pleasurable' – one has to see the *surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic drive*. That is, the drive that represents the pleasure in 'seeing', which has the look as its object of desire, is related both to the myth of origins, the primal scene, and the problematic of fetishism and locates the surveyed object within the 'imaginary'

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p 79.

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Metz *op cit*, pp 59-60.

relation. Like voyeurism, surveillance must depend for its effectivity on 'the *active consent* which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) and establishes in the scopic space the illusion of the object relation'<sup>16</sup>. The ambivalence of this form of 'consent' in objectification – real as mythical – is the *ambivalence* on which the stereotype turns and illustrates that crucial bind of pleasure and power that Foucault asserts but, in my view, fails to explain.

My anatomy of colonial discourse remains incomplete until I locate the stereotype, as an arrested, fetishistic mode of representation within its field of identification, which I have identified in my description of Fanon's primal scenes, as the Lacanian schema of the Imaginary. The Imaginary<sup>17</sup> is the transformation that takes place in the subject at the formative mirror phase, when it assumes a *discrete* image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, samenesses, identities, between the objects of the surrounding world. However, this positioning is itself *problematic*, for the subject finds or recognises itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational. This is the basis of the close relation between the two forms of identification complicit with the Imaginary – narcissism and aggressivity. It is precisely these two forms of 'identification' that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it. Like the mirror phase 'the fullness' of the stereotype – its image *as* identity – is always threatened by 'lack'.

The construction of colonial discourse is then a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism – metaphor and metonymy – and the forms of narcissistic and aggressive identification available to the Imaginary. Stereotypical racial discourse is a four-term strategy. There is a tie-up between the metaphoric or masking function of the fetish and the narcissistic object-choice and an opposing alliance between the metonymic figuring of lack and the aggressive phase of the Imaginary. A repertoire of conflictual positions constitute the subject in colonial discourse. The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical conjuncture, is thus always problematic – the site of both fixity and fantasy. It provides a colonial 'identity' that is played out – like all fantasies of originality and origination – in the face and space of the disruption and threat from the heterogeneity of other positions. As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the 'stereotype' requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes. The process by which the metaphoric 'masking' is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype both its fixity and its phantasmatic quality – the *same old* stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time.

In any specific colonial discourse the metaphoric/narcissistic and the metonymic/aggressive positions will function simultaneously, but

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, pp 62-63.

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<sup>17</sup> For the best account of Lacan's concept of the Imaginary see Jacqueline Rose, 'The Imaginary' in Colin MacCabe (ed), *The Talking Cure*, London, Macmillan, 1981.

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<sup>18</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', *Toward the African Revolution*, London, Pelican, 1970, p 44.

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<sup>19</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, op cit, p 114.

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always strategically poised in relation to each other; similar to the moment of alienation which stands as a threat to Imaginary plentitude, and 'multiple belief' which threatens fetishistic disavowal. Caught in the Imaginary as they are, these shifting positionalities will never seriously threaten the dominant power relations, for they exist to exercise them pleasurably and productively. They will always pose the problem of difference as that between the pre-constituted, 'natural' poles of Black and White with all its historical and ideological ramifications. The *knowledge of the construction* of that 'opposition' will be denied the colonial subject. He is constructed within an apparatus of power which *contains*, in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge—a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness, that fixed form of difference, that I have called the stereotype. Fanon poignantly describes the effects of this process for a colonised culture:

*a continued agony rather than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture. The culture once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yolk of oppression. Both present and mummified, it testifies against its members. . . . The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking. . . . As though it were possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within the framework of a culture that recognises him and that he decides to assume.*<sup>18</sup>

My four-term strategy of the stereotype tries tentatively to provide a structure and a process for the 'subject' of a colonial discourse. I now want to take up the problem of discrimination as the political effect of such a discourse and relate it to the question of 'race' and 'skin'. To that end it is important to remember that the multiple belief that accompanies fetishism does not only have disavowal value; it also has 'knowledge value' and it is this that I shall now pursue. In calculating this knowledge value it is crucial to consider what Fanon means when he says that:

*There is a quest for the Negro, the Negro is a demand, one cannot get along without him, he is needed, but only if he is made palatable in a certain way. Unfortunately the Negro knocks down the system and breaks the treaties.*<sup>19</sup>

To understand this demand and how the native or Negro is made 'palatable' we must acknowledge some significant differences between the general theory of fetishism and its specific uses for an understanding of racist discourse. First, the fetish of colonial discourse—what Fanon calls the epidermal schema—is not, like the sexual fetish, a secret. Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies. Secondly, it may be said that sexual fetish is closely linked to the 'good object'; it is the prop that makes the whole object desirable and lovable,



facilitates sexual relations and can even promote a form of happiness. The stereotype can also be seen as that particular 'fixated' form of the colonial subject which *facilitates* colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised. If it is claimed that the colonised are most often objects of hate, then we can reply with Freud that

*affection and hostility in the treatment of the fetish – which run parallel with the disavowal and acknowledgement of castration – are mixed in unequal proportions in different cases, so that the one or the other is more clearly recognisable.*<sup>20</sup>

What this statement recognises is the wide *range* of the stereotype, from the loyal servant to Satan, from the loved to the hated; a shifting of subject positions in the circulation of colonial power which I tried to account for through the motility of the metaphoric/narcissistic and metonymic/aggressive system of colonial discourse. What remains to be examined, however, is the construction of the signifier of 'skin/race' in those regimes of visibility and discursivity – fetishistic, scopophilic, imaginary – within which I have located the stereotypes. It is only on that basis that we can construct its 'knowledge – value' which will, I hope, enable us to see the place of fantasy in the exercise of colonial power.

My argument relies upon a particular reading of the problematic of representation which, Fanon suggests, is specific to the colonial situation. He writes:

*the originality of the colonial context is that the economic substructure is also a superstructure. . . . you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.*<sup>21</sup>

Fanon could either be seen to be adhering to a simple reflectionist or determinist notion of cultural/social signification or, more interestingly, he could be read as taking an 'anti-repressionist' position (attacking the notion that ideology as miscognition, or misrepresentation, is the repression of the real). For our purposes I tend towards the latter reading which then provides a 'visibility' to the exercise of power; gives force to the argument that skin, as a signifier of discrimination, must be produced or processed as visible. As Abbot says, in a very different context,

*whereas repression banishes its object into the unconscious, forgets and attempts to forget the forgetting, discrimination must constantly invite its representations into consciousness, re-inforcing the crucial recognition of difference which they embody and revitalising them for the perception on which its effectivity depends. . . . It must sustain itself on the presence of the very difference which is also its object.*<sup>22</sup>

What 'authorises' discrimination, Abbot continues, is the occlusion of the preconstruction or working-up of difference:

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<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *op cit*, p 357.

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<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, Penguin, 1969.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Abbott, 'Authority', *Screen* Summer 1979, vol 20 no 2, pp 15-16.

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p 16.

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

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<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, op cit, p 79.

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*this repression of production entails that the recognition of difference is procured in an innocence, as a 'nature'; recognition is contrived as primary cognition, spontaneous effect of the 'evidence of the visible'.*<sup>23</sup>

This is precisely the kind of recognition, as spontaneous and visible, that is attributed to the stereotype. The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural – colour as the cultural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural '*identity*'. However, Abbot's account stops at the point of 'identification' and strangely colludes with the *success* of discriminatory practices by suggesting that their representations require the repression of the working-up of difference; to argue otherwise, according to him, would be to put the subject in

*an impossible awareness, since it would run into consciousness the heterogeneity of the subject as a place of articulation.*<sup>24</sup>

Despite his awareness of the crucial recognition of difference for discrimination and its problematisation of repression, Abbot is trapped in his unitary place of articulation. He comes close to suggesting that it is possible, however momentarily and illusorily, for the *perpetrator* of the discriminatory discourse to be in a position that is *unmarked by the discourse* to the extent to which the *object* of discrimination is deemed natural and visible. What Abbot neglects is the facilitating role of contradiction and heterogeneity in the construction of authoritarian practices and their strategic, discursive fixations.

Although the 'authority' of colonial discourse depends crucially on its location in narcissism and the Imaginary, my concept of stereotype-as-suture is a recognition of the *ambivalence* of that authority and those orders of identification. The role of fetishistic identification, in the construction of discriminatory knowledges that depend on the 'presence of difference', is to provide a process of splitting and multiple/contradictory belief at the point of enunciation and subjectification. It is this crucial splitting of the ego which is represented in Fanon's description of the construction of the colonial subject as effect of stereotypical discourse: the subject primordially fixed and yet triply split between the incongruent knowledges of body, race, ancestors. Assailed by the stereotype,

*the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal scheme . . . . It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but a triple person. . . . I was not given one, but two, three places.*<sup>25</sup>

This process is best understood in terms of the articulation of multiple belief that Freud proposes in the essay on fetishism. It is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of origins, the other that articulates difference and division. Its knowledge 'value' lies

in its orientation as a defence towards external reality, and provides, in Metz's words,

*the lasting matrix, the effective prototype of all those splittings of belief which man will henceforth be capable of in the most varied domains, of all the infinitely complex unconscious and occasionally conscious interactions which he will allow himself between believing and not-believing. . . .*<sup>26</sup>

It is through this notion of splitting and multiple belief that, I believe, it becomes easier to see the bind of knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure, that informs the particular regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse. The visibility of the racial/colonial other is at once a *point* of identity ('Look, a Negro') and at the same time a *problem* for the attempted closure within discourse. For the recognition of difference as 'imaginary' points of identity and origin – such as Black and White – is disturbed by the representation of splitting in the discourse. What I called the play between the metaphoric-narcissistic and metonymic-aggressive moments in colonial discourse – that four-part strategy of the stereotype – crucially recognises the prefiguring of desire as a potentially conflictual, disturbing force in all those regimes of 'originality' that I have brought together. In the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject; and in that form of substitution and fixation that is fetishism there is always the trace of loss, absence. To put it succinctly, the recognition and disavowal of 'difference' is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction. The stereotype is in fact an 'impossible' object. For that very reason, the exertions of the 'official knowledges' of colonialism – pseudo-scientific, typological, legal-administrative, eugenicist – are imbricated at the point of their production of meaning and power with the fantasy that dramatises the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin. Not itself the object of desire but its setting, not an ascription of prior identities but their production in the syntax of the scenario of racist discourse, colonial fantasy plays a crucial part in those everyday scenes of subjectification in a colonial society which Fanon refers to repeatedly. Like fantasies of the origins of sexuality, the productions of 'colonial desire' mark the discourse as

*a favoured spot for the most primitive defensive reactions such as turning against oneself, into an opposite, projection, negation . . .*<sup>27</sup>

The problem of origin as the problematic of racist, stereotypical knowledge is a complex one and what I have said about its construction will come clear in this illustration from Fanon. Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory prac-

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<sup>26</sup> Christian Metz, op cit, p 70.

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<sup>27</sup> J Laplanche and J B Pontalis, 'Phantasy (or Fantasy)', *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London, Hogarth, 1980, p 318.

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<sup>28</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, op cit, p 80.

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<sup>29</sup> see Karl Abraham, 'Transformations of Scopophilia', *Selected Papers*, London, Hogarth 1978.

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tices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse:

*My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage. the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up.*<sup>28</sup>

It is the scenario of colonial fantasy which, in staging the ambivalence of desire, articulates the demand for the Negro which the Negro disrupts. For the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding to the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the coloniser, the stereotyped other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defense) of that position of mastery. For if 'skin' in racist discourse is the visibility of darkness, and a prime signifier of the body and its social and cultural correlates, then we are bound to remember what Karl Abrahams<sup>29</sup> says in his seminal work on the scopoc drive. The pleasure-value of darkness is a withdrawal in order to know nothing of the external world. Its symbolic meaning, however, is thoroughly ambivalent. Darkness signifies at once both birth and death; it is in all cases a desire to return to the fullness of the mother, a desire for an unbroken and undifferentiated line of vision and origin.

But surely there is another scene of colonial discourse in which the native or Negro meets the demand of colonial discourse; where the subverting 'split' is recuperable within a strategy of social and political control. It is recognisably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief. The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. In each case what is being dramatised is a separation – *between* races, cultures, histories, *within* histories – a separation between *before* and *after* that repeats obsessively the mythical moment of disjunction. Despite the structural similarities with the play of need and desire in primal fantasies, the colonial fantasy does not try to cover up that moment of separation. It is more ambivalent. On the one hand, it proposes a teleology – under certain conditions of colonial

domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonised the capacities of self-government, independence, western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power. Colonial fantasy is the continual dramatisation of emergence—of difference, freedom—as the beginning of a history which is repetitively denied. Such a denial is the clearly voiced demand of colonial discourse as the legitimisation of a form of rule that is facilitated by the racist fetish. In concluding, I would like to develop a little further my working definition of colonial discourse given at the start of this article.

Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognise the difference of race, culture, history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalise a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory, vestigial, archaic, 'mythical', and, crucially, are recognised as being so. By 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonised population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation. What is visible is the *necessity* of such rule which is justified by those moralistic and normative ideologies of amelioration recognised as the Civilising Mission or the White Man's Burden. However, there co-exist within the same apparatus of colonial power, modern systems and sciences of government, progressive 'Western' forms of social and economic organisation which provide the manifest justification for the project of colonialism—an argument which, in part, impressed Karl Marx. It is on the site of this co-existence that strategies of hierarchisation and marginalisation are employed in the management of colonial societies. And if my deduction from Fanon about the peculiar visibility of colonial power is acceptable to you, then I would extend that to say that it is a form of governmentality in which the 'ideological' space functions in more openly collaborative ways with political and economic exigencies. The barracks stand by the church which stands by the schoolroom; the cantonment stands hard by the 'civil lines'. Such visibility of the institutions and apparatuses of power is possible because the exercise of colonial power makes their *relationship* obscure, produces them as fetishes, spectacles of a 'natural'/racial pre-eminence. Only the seat of government is always elsewhere—alien and separate by that distance upon which surveillance depends for its strategies of objectification, normalisation and discipline.

The last word belongs to Fanon:

*... this behaviour [of the coloniser] betrays a determination to objectify, to*

<sup>30</sup> Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', op cit, p 44.

*confine, to imprison, to harden. Phrases such as 'I know them', 'that's the way they are', show this maximum objectification successfully achieved. . . . There is on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can be recognised. As against this, [in colonial cultures] we find characteristics, curiosities, things, never a structure.*<sup>30</sup>

This article is a revision of a paper given at the Sociology of Literature Conference, Essex University, 1982 and published in Francis Barker, (ed), *The Politics of Theory*, Colchester, 1983. I would like to thank Dr Stephan Feuchtwang of the City University for providing the critical and companionable context in which it was written, and Terry Eagleton for inviting me to speak on the subject at Oxford University and for his comments afterwards.

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# CHANNEL 4: WORKING NOTES

BY JOHN ELLIS

ON NOVEMBER 2, 1982, Channel 4 began broadcasting to most of Britain. This is a series of observations from my experience of independent production for this new Channel: specifically from producing a series of 15 programmes about world cinema entitled *Visions: Cinema*. The first of these programmes (November 10, 1982) coincided almost exactly with the publication date of my book on film and television, *Visible Fictions*, completed the previous January. Several people have asked about this rather abrupt transition between critical analysis of institutions and aesthetics to actually working for one of these institutions. At the moment, that transition does not seem to have been as difficult as another, that from being an employee of a settled academic institution to becoming an employer within an independent company with unpredictable long-term prospects. The history of Channel 4 over the last year or more shows that I am not alone in having found this a difficult adjustment to make.

## Channel 4's Task

In an increasingly dismal political climate, it is becoming clear exactly how much of an impossible task Channel 4 has been set. It has a statutory commitment to 'innovation and experiment in form and content', and an obligation to commission programmes from independent producers. Yet it is to be financed for its initial five years by a subscription from the companies who run the main commercial network, ITV, and thereafter from its own advertising revenue. The first commitment implies that the Channel should seek new audiences, and define new ways of approaching the question of who broadcasts what to whom. The second demands that it should maximise audience numbers as quickly as possible. As the first year of operation progressed, this conflict was resolved by the Channel's decision that its overall share of the viewing audience should be increased from an initial 4% (subsequently more like 3%) to 7% by the end of that first year. The few available comparisons (the launch of BBC2 for example) suggest that this target is very difficult if not impossible to meet; yet political and financial pressures make it important for the Channel to achieve it. This would demonstrate to

advertising agencies that the Channel does reach a considerable number of people, and so would resolve the problems of lack of advertising that so bedevilled the early months of broadcasting.

The urgency of this task is so great because of the particular way that the Channel's financing has been set up. The members of the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA) pay a subscription for the running of Channel 4, roughly calculated in proportion to the size of the profits they make from their regional ITV contracts. In return, it is they, and not Channel 4, who sell advertising on the Channel and recoup the money from this advertising. At the same time, these companies are producing programmes for Channel 4, in many cases using up the excess studio, equipment and personnel accumulated through the rather richer years of commercial broadcasting. In practice, the ITCA companies have found it very difficult to sell advertising space on the Channel in their regions: partly because the concept of directing TV advertising towards specific target audiences is a new one; partly because of a ragged dispute between the producers of advertising and the actors' union Equity; and partly because the current methods of compiling statistics on the numbers actually viewing TV rest on a very small sample (about 7000 sets) that make them insensitive to 'minority' audiences. And while income from advertising revenue has been less than the ITCA companies had expected, the presence of a large number of independent suppliers, providing almost half the Channel's output, has tended to bring down the cost of programmes for the Channel. Quite simply, the independents do not have the same kind of overheads in terms of staff or facilities that the ITCA companies have. Their existence is, in most cases, dependent on short-term contracts from the Channel, and their cash flow and profit margins are closely monitored. While this enables the Channel to keep providing programmes within its overall budget, it is not such good news for the ITCA companies. Their programmes are being bought by Channel 4 at a lesser price than they might have expected, because in most cases independent suppliers can make them cheaper. It seems to the ITCA companies that they have a bad deal from Channel 4, even though it is they who provide the basic financing and administer the advertising sales.

As a result, there is pressure to alter the fundamental working arrangement that enables the Channel to choose where its programmes should come from. At the end of the first financial year (April 1983), the ITCA companies made a bid to commute part of their subscription for Channel 4 from payment in money to payment in kind, to the direct supply of a proportion of the Channel's programmes. This would produce the situation that the ITCA companies had lobbied for at the time of the legislation to set up the Channel: a kind of ITV2, where programmes were supplied in proportion to the richness of each ITCA company's regional franchise. A large proportion of Channel 4's output would then be determined by an *ad hoc* body of ITCA companies not dissimilar to that which apportions the shares of networked time on ITV.

The April attempt by the ITCA companies was unsuccessful, but it



certainly added a fresh sense of urgency to the race for a 7% share of the viewing audience as computed by the statistical samplers. It also demonstrated the fundamental contradiction in the constitution of Channel 4, between its reliance on commercial funding and its aim to provide a new force in British broadcasting that recognises the importance of the so-called 'minority' audiences. This contradiction is not yet resolved. It defines the terms on which the struggle for the eventual shape of Channel 4 is currently taking place. It has equally defined the initial shape of the Channel and the outlines of its commissioning policy.

## **Independence**

The initial form of Channel 4 is a political compromise. It was engineered by the last Conservative government as one of their final acts before the transition to Thatcherite government by decree rather than by consultation and compromise. The Channel was constituted as a commissioning organisation, not as a programme producing organisation. Such a model is new to British broadcasting, though not to European broadcasting: the German ZDF, among others, commissions most of its output. However, Channel 4's internal organisation is not noticeably planned along the model of similar institutions abroad. It grew as a combination of inspired ideas and imitation of existing British models. It is a rather odd bureaucracy, overstaffed in some areas, understaffed in others, and containing a number of conflicting ideologies and practices. This caused many difficulties, especially in the very early days of transmission. Equally, those who received commissions were having to invent institutions and practices without available models for comparison. Never has the insularity of national TV and the lack of study of other national structures been more deeply felt. The result has been a Channel that is rather less experimental in its output than it could have been, and a large number of production companies whose present status is confused and whose future is uncertain.

The political compromise founding Channel 4 was between the traditional practice of TV production, through large integrated companies represented by the ITCA companies, and their dialectical opposite, the independent companies. Independent production is the liberal solution to the perception of industrial TV production as restrictive and bureaucratic for creative programme-makers. A broadly similar outlook existed in Hollywood in the 1930s, and it gained an ascendancy in the '40s.

However, 'independence' in terms of TV production has been a very much more difficult idea to establish. The process of industrial TV production cannot be pulled apart into constituent elements as easily as feature film production, because the product is very different. Channel 4 has set up a situation where independent production companies exist whose product is programmes, not broadcast TV. The precious plastic case containing an hour's worth of one-inch tape is a programme; delivered into the hands of the Channel and broadcast, it becomes TV.

While the programme is in production, there is little or no sense of how it will fit with other segments on the same Channel. Ten months after the Channel's debut, programme-makers still find it difficult to get any idea of other adjacent programmes, of the kind of presentation that will surround their work, or of the kinds of advertisements.

Another aspect of independent production is currently causing some problems. Several companies, ours included, were constituted on the basis of a single major commission from Channel 4. The Channel had to call into existence a whole new sector of production, both in terms of facilities houses (heavily capitalised, offering the expensive machines and personnel needed for broadcast TV production) and in terms of production companies. The majority of the latter have a small working capital, though some have been funded by Channel 4 to purchase equipment, like Diverse Productions who produce *The Friday Alternative* news programme. The process of constituting these companies was very much like that of receiving a grant from a state funding institution: Channel 4 provided start-up costs for office premises and office equipment, a substantial number of programmes were commissioned from each company so constituted, and staffing and operating costs were designed to fit the budget and scope of these commissions. This early relationship was very much a client relationship, with the Channel bringing into being a series of enthusiastic production groups.

After a year, in the summer of 1983, these commissions ended. The Channel came to negotiate the second phase of its relationship with the companies that it had brought into being. At this point, the implicit model altered. Instead of the arts funding body and client relationship, there emerged the more traditional relationship between the freelance employee and the institutional employer. Companies were kept waiting until the last possible moment for news about whether their commission would be renewed; renewals were for six or seven months rather than for a year; competition for some commissions emerged between both new and established groups; and some of the production companies were brought up against their nature as capitalist enterprises rather than as collective endeavours. The shift has been towards a more commercial atmosphere, and its real victims have been those whose role in production companies has been lower on the scale of division of labour. In some companies, the production fee paid by the Channel to the company (15% of programme costs, minus any overspending on the agreed budget) has been appropriated by the directors of that company for their own use rather than for that of the entire production group. Finally, the real meaning of 'independent production' has become clear: the responsibility for disputes between labour and management has been to a large degree shifted out of the broadcasting institution to the production companies. Employees protesting at the cancellation of their programme series can only enter into dispute with their own production company, which is not the source of the cancellation. These have been the discoveries of summer '83. They have destroyed the sense of a joint endeavour which was shared between Channel 4 independent suppliers

and the Channel itself. Perhaps this is not such a bad effect, as the corporate identity between the BBC and even the most downtrodden of its employees has been one of the greatest forces against an open debate about TV production between producers and serious critics.

These then are the conditions of independent production for Channel 4: the production of programmes rather than of TV and the shifting nature of the relationship to the Channel as commissioning agency. My experience of them has been very particular.

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<sup>1</sup> For the central documents from this lobbying process, see *Screen*, vol 21 no 4, 1980/81, pp 56-79.

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## Large Door Ltd

Through 1979 and 1980, I was involved in the Independent Film-Makers' Association's lobbying around the legislative process which set up Channel 4.<sup>1</sup> In June 1981 I submitted a short proposal to its new Chief Executive Jeremy Isaacs (at that point, no commissioning structure had been invented) for a regular programme series about world cinema. In March 1982, Keith Griffiths and Simon Hartog, both experienced producers who were among the very few able to undertake such a project, and myself, inexperienced in any form of production, were commissioned to make an experimental pilot. This was delivered early in June 1982. In late July, we were commissioned by the Channel for 15 hour-long programmes about world cinema, to be delivered over 10 months and budgeted at a total of a little under half a million pounds. This was a little over half the budget we had initially calculated.

At this point, the parameters of the project became fairly clear: a series of a scope not before attempted on this subject was to be made on an extremely tight budget. It also had to start very quickly, too quickly. We still had to form a production company, find office accommodation and staff, all with three programmes (subsequently four) to be delivered by Christmas. By the beginning of September, the company had been formed, complete with punning title, and the rest of the production team had been assembled: Bette Chapkis from the Arts Council, Simon Hicklin from an advertising production company, Janine Marmot from non-broadcast video. So at the beginning of September, six people with very diverse backgrounds and assumptions set out to produce a TV series. It wasn't easy.

## Visions: Cinema

Our 15 programmes provided all but three of the *Visions: Cinema* slot from the second week of the Channel's operation in November 1982 until September 1983. The other three programmes were special documentaries bought in by Paul Madden, the commissioning editor. The slot was rather irregular: it was fortnightly, alternating with the intellectual discussion slot, *Voices*; there were occasional breaks in the transmission pattern; the series was transmitted late on a Wednesday night—ex-

cept during March when it moved to Thursday.

The programmes were devised to contain two items each, occasionally running to three, or consisting of one special. The basic aim was to work within the bounds of established TV practice, to use TV to present aspects of cinema. In the terms I used in *Visible Fictions*, this would be to use TV as the gaze at something beyond the confines of the home, assuming that the viewer's attention would be one of the glance rather than the gaze; assuming a role of making phenomena intelligible, and of working within a form that is extensive rather than intensive, segmented rather than sequential. We were to some extent uneasy about this attitude to TV production, a worry that was reflected in a proposed series title: *Cinema Invaders*. Especially during the earlier months of production, we vacillated between two distinct conceptions of the programme: one, the more conventional, to use TV to look at cinema; the other, more avant-gardist, to treat the programmes as the irruption of cinema into TV. The second conception involves the use of cinematic forms of address rather than televisual, and assumptions about the viewing attitude that belong to cinema rather than to TV. This second tendency was accentuated by the relative isolation of independent production for Channel 4, an isolation from the sense of making TV and a concentration on making separate programmes that can be much more like cinematic production.

The route we charted through this tension gave us the position of seeming to push at the edges of some (but by no means all) of the structural assumptions of TV programmes, but of nevertheless remaining inside them. In generic terms, we found a place beside those pockets of 'creativity' within TV documentary production, the 'arts programme'. From the outset, the *Visions: Cinema* programmes were conceived as a regular series, whose regularity could be traded off against a continual novelty in programme construction. This is the strategy of Melvyn Bragg's *South Bank Show* from London Weekend Television, or Alan Yentob's *Arena* slot on BBC2. In our case, the strategy was somewhat vitiated by a lack of regularity in the scheduling of the slot; and by working on an overall budget which was equivalent to little over a third of these other two examples.

We found that virtually all of our programme items could be categorised into four headings. These reflect the past practices of Simon Hartog, Keith Griffiths and myself; they also reflect budgetary assumptions, as they have drastically different budgetary levels. The four areas are:

- 1) The Report, a journalistic piece reflecting a particular recent event: a film festival like Nantes or Cannes, the trade convention of the Canon Classics group.
- 2) The Survey of a particular context of film-making, like the reports from Shanghai and Hong Kong, and the critical profile of Bombay popular cinema.
- 3) The Auteur Profile, like the interviews with Michael Snow and Paul Schrader, Chris Petit's *hommage* to Wim Wenders, or Ian

Christie's interviews with various people about their impressions of Godard's work.

4) The Review, usually of a single film, sometimes by a literary intellectual, ranging from Farrukh Dhondy on *Gandhi* to Angela Carter on *The Draughtsman's Contract*. About half the reviews were by established film writers, like Colin McArthur on *Local Hero* or Jane Clarke on *A Question of Silence*.



The literary critic:  
Angela Carter  
reviews *The  
Draughtsman's  
Contract*

These are scarcely kinds of material that could be found in *Screen*; they represent a much broader conception of film culture befitting a programme which is breaking new grounds in terms of TV journalism, showing for the first time as a reasonably regular feature of British TV that cinema is a very diverse institution deserving more than cavalier attention.

The combination of items into programmes was a fairly late decision, necessarily late since broadcast dates were not set far in advance. This gave an added feel of diversity to any one programme, since items had a very different pace and level of assumed attention to them. To take a relatively successful example, the programme of Wednesday May 25, 1983:

The first 37 minutes consisted of a report from the Cannes Film Festival, costing about £20,000, explaining in straightforward journalistic terms the way in which the Festival works (a mystery to most people) and why it is important. It mixed clips from films from all sections of the Festival with short interviews with figures as diverse as Chantal Akerman, Jerry Lewis and Nagisa Oshima. Its focus was global: the only English-language film mentioned was Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*. While the Festival prizes provided one reason for the selection of one film over another, some films, like Yamamoto Masashi's *Dark Carnival*, were included simply because they represented interesting

new tendencies in film-making. The second part of the programme, lasting 15 mins, had a very much more reflective pace and lower cost (about £7,000). This was Mary Holland's review of Edward Bennett's *Ascendancy* – her view of the film as a journalist whose specialism is Irish politics and society. Using several clips from the film, she assessed it as a representation of several aspects of the Ulster situation, and then rebuked the British film critics for their timidity in the face of a film that used the techniques of European art cinema to examine a situation that is rather closer to home.

The total cost of this programme, about £27,000 in direct expenditure (excluding Large Door's by no means extravagant overheads), was close to the average cost per programme over the whole series. However, many programmes had to be substantially cheaper since a large chunk of the budget had been committed to three programmes about cinema in the Far East. The decision to combine the Cannes report with a film review was made early in 1983; however, the choice of film was made only a month before the broadcast date, when it became possible to preview films scheduled for release at that time.

Such a programme falls within the definition of a TV 'arts programme'. Yet two aspects of the overall series strategy distinguish *Visions: Cinema* from the procedures of other such programmes. First, Large Door has been committed to basing many of its programmes around scripts by particular critics, like Tony Rayn's discovery of Chinese and Hong Kong cinema, or Behroze Gandhi and Rosie Thomas's semi-political exploration of Bombay entertainment films. Second, we were committed from the outset to avoiding the idea of a linking presenter, whose voice and physical presence contextualise items, and give the programme a cultural cachet, as Melvyn Bragg does. Eventually, a series of voices were used to provide short introductory 'menus' and transitions between items. These two strategies, combined with the use for film reviews of people with no previous history of TV appearance, was perhaps the single most problematic aspect of *Visions: Cinema*. Both people within Channel 4 and a wide range of acquaintances of the production group all objected to the 'uncomfortable' or 'unprofessional' nature of the presentation, particularly by people presenting their opinions in direct address. While some of this was an objection to the opinions themselves, rather than the presentation, it has revealed a problem that is perhaps more acute in British TV than elsewhere. There is a very narrow band of speech pattern and body language that is acceptable on British TV. Objections to this tend to be voiced in terms of 'the audience', as in 'I don't think it makes the audience feel at home'. This ascription of personal opinions to a generalised concept of 'the audience' reveals a fundamental set of assumptions on which British TV operates, assumptions that I did not deal with to any significant extent in *Visible Fictions*.

Our adoption of the mode of the 'arts programme', together with this perceived problem with voice and presentation, the result of a policy of giving access to a group of intellectuals hitherto virtually disenfranchised by TV, has tended to put *Visions: Cinema* into the small group of

programmes on Channel 4 that are perceived by progressive critics as somehow being 'experimental'. This was not uppermost in our intentions in proposing and constructing the programmes: the main intention was to be different from the existing coverage of cinema, a task which seemed easy enough until we tried to do it. Such a designation is flattering enough for us, but worrying for Channel 4. It means that the expected 'experimentation' in programme-making has not been as general within the Channel's output as many had initially expected. But this designation of our programmes has also tended to block off constructive critical comment from within what the BFI refer to as 'the film culture'. One particular aspect of our programme strategy seems to me to be open to criticism. This is a tendency towards exoticism, towards treating the chosen aspects of world cinema as some kind of weird sideshow in the patronising way that is familiar from the more crass forms of anthropological documentary, or news report about the Third World. Apparently endemic to the conventional procedures of TV, this exoticism involves a representational structure in which the viewer's gaze is delegated to the TV institution, thus setting up a strong sense of the home over and against what is outside it.



A tendency towards exoticism? Chinese director Sun Yu.

The only solution that we have been able to adopt is a reformist one, of taking this exoticist attitude to a new and more compromised level, compared to other arts programmes.<sup>2</sup> Serious writers who have a wide knowledge of a particular area have been central to the programmes since their conception. Interviews have been subtitled rather than dubbed wherever possible, and subtitling has been one of the special skills that has been acquired by the production team. Voice-overs have been provided by the reporters themselves, or occasionally by actors using the appropriate accent, a process which itself can easily decline into the patronising. But the problem of exoticism in TV coverage of the Third World in particular seems to have no clear solution, unlike some of the more mundane

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<sup>2</sup> Given the almost total concentration of TV arts programmes on European high-culture, perhaps the mere fact of showing something different is a progressive gesture.

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aspects of TV production. Whether any result will be deemed 'acceptable to the audience' is quite another question.

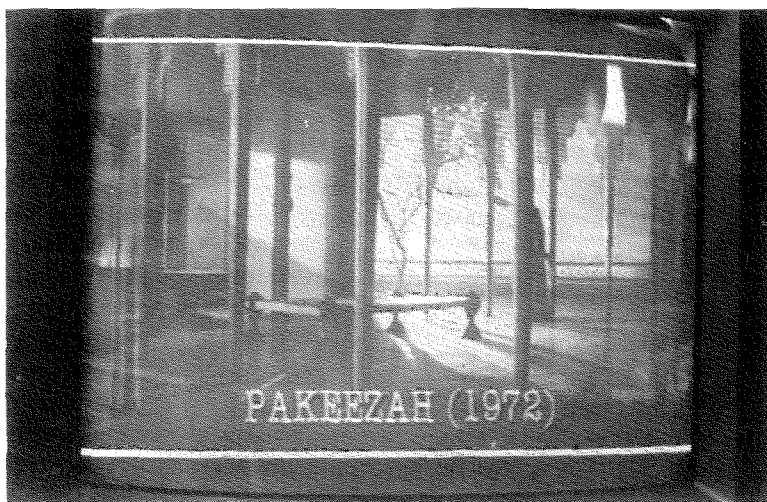
#### **Channel 4: Two Structural Problems**

Two major problems have emerged in our dealings with Channel 4. They are not problems that are the result of any particular personalities, as our relations with individuals within the Channel have in almost all cases been amicable. They are structural: one is the particular problem of Channel 4, the impossibility for programme-makers to initiate or undertake any real planning in relation to the Channel. The other is a problem that the Channel has inherited from TV culture as a whole, the concept of 'the audience'.

The structure of Channel 4, divided between peripheral independent production and central commissioning and scheduling, initially provided acute problems. In the early weeks, it was impossible to find out more than a week in advance what time a programme would be transmitted, how long it should be, and whether it should be constructed with any commercial breaks. Planning of the commissioned séries as a whole was clearly impossible. Beyond two decisions (to devote a large section of the budget to the Far East shoot; to spend very little on the initial programmes since they were to be made so hurriedly) we were, like the Channel itself, planning only six to eight weeks ahead. Such insanely short lead times are a thing of the past now; our next project accepted for *Visions: Cinema* is a series of six single-item programmes for broadcast in February and March 1984, whose planning began in July 1982. This lead time seemed luxuriously long, until our initial research on a proposed programme on Luis Bunuel discovered that an *Arena* project on his later films for the same date had already been in research for 18 months.

In a wider sense, planning is difficult if not impossible. There is no link between the scheduling of feature films and the *Visions: Cinema* programme, except on very rare occasions. Usually, feature films are scheduled late in the development of schedules, about four weeks before transmission. No one agency within the Channel is responsible for scheduling films. As a result, the seasons of films that do exist go unremarked, like the 'Gathering Storm' which grouped on Saturday afternoons virtually all the Hollywood films made about the development of Fascism in Europe (e.g. Borzage's *Three Comrades*), and some rarities from the war itself, like Curtiz's *Mission to Moscow*, complete with prologue by the US Ambassador to Moscow. There is no mechanism for providing the producers of cinema programmes with advance information of films scheduled, or even of films bought. There have been two exceptions: the season of three Godard films accompanying our screening of Godard's tape on *Passion*, and our programme about Bombay cinema, solicited by the Channel to support the screening of several Hindi films.





Supportive programming: a clip from the Indian film *Pakeezah*.

In a wider sense, too, planning is very difficult. The change in the attitude towards commissioning has aggravated the uncertainty under which independent suppliers are working. There is no assurance that any particular company will be responsible for the bulk of the Channel's cinema coverage after April 1984, let alone that Large Door will continue to be in this position. Given the long time that it took to establish a relationship of mutual information between Large Door and the American major film distributors, this will create even greater planning difficulties. Any element of topicality in the Channel's cinema coverage (already attenuated) could be lost, as there is no agency within the Channel that could provide this co-ordination. The failure to plan coverage and to co-ordinate different programme areas is perhaps the greatest problem in the current way that Channel 4 works. As the Channel deprives itself of such a possibility, independent suppliers are left in an even more difficult position.

Channel 4's other structural difficulty is with the concept of 'audience'. The central contradiction inherent in the Channel's funding may have precipitated this situation, but it is surprising, given the Channel's initial commitment to conceiving the question anew, that so much of the conventional attitude towards the conception has been incorporated in its ways of working. For 'audience' is a profoundly ideological concept, that has very little to do with what viewers are doing or how they are interpellated. Broadcasting institutions are not concerned with 'viewers', but they are with 'audience'. Viewers are individuals, people who *use* TV within their domestic and group social contexts. Viewers are the few people who ring in to the duty officer, or write to the broadcasters or to newspapers, expressing their opinions. Viewers record programmes on VCRs<sup>3</sup> and use them later, pausing or replaying when attention wanders, shuttling forward when interest fades. Audiences, however, do not have these irritating characteristics. Audiences are bulk ag-

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<sup>3</sup> Some recent research shows that about 30% of British households with TV sets now have video cassette recorders. Yet home taping of broadcast TV appears only as a marginal and unquantifiable factor in viewing figures.

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glomerations created by statistical research. They have no voices and the most basic of characteristics, they 'belong' to income groups and are endowed with a few broad educational and cultural features. Audiences do not use TV, they watch it and consume it. Broadcasting institutions do not seek viewers, they seek audiences. The concept of the viewer is one that expresses the complexity of potential uses of broadcast TV and of the social roles that TV performs. The concept of audience measures the merest surface layer of this process, the number of TV sets switched to a particular channel at a particular time. It then extrapolates the number of viewers who should or might be watching that set.

'Audience' is an ideological concept in the crudest sense of the word. It tells very little about the object supposedly analysed by it, but it certainly has effects. The concept of audience governs what viewers are given to use on their TV sets, or to tape on their VCRs. It governs the broad outlines of the policies of broadcasting institutions, as well as the details of their implementation. Audience is a concept that is spreading its influence even as the activities of viewers are increasingly at odds with it. It has reached even into those areas that have traditionally been protected from it. It defines the terrain on which Channel 4 is working, a terrain that is hostile to the initial aims of the Channel.

Historically, as everyone knows, the concept of audience originated with TV broadcasting that depended for its operating revenues and profits on the sale of advertising space. Audience defined to the satisfaction of advertising agencies the spread and effectivity of the space in which the advertising occurred. Initially, simple numbers (in millions) would suffice, then a number of demographic factors were introduced to specify income group, predominant spending patterns, other leisure consumption, within those millions. More sophisticated and detailed gathering of figures claimed to be able to represent the pattern of viewing within programmes (whether a programme 'sustains' its audience), and the movement of audiences from one part of a schedule to another (whether a programme 'inherits' an audience or is able to 'hand it on'). Figures are nowadays provided in a regional breakdown, and expressed in terms of millions or of percentages of the total audience.

The early use of the ideology of audience and its accompanying statistical detailing took place within a fairly closed circle: audience figures were used to justify the flow of cash from one institution to another, from corporate advertiser to advertising agency to broadcasting institution to programme-making department. Perhaps there is a certain primitive poetry in millions of people being used to justify the expenditure of millions of pounds, a poetry expressed in the current cliché of industry claims that TV 'delivers' audiences to advertisers. Yet certainly within British broadcasting, and probably in virtually any other country with developed broadcasting, the ideology of audience was historically just one among several. Notions of public service broadcasting, of cultural uplift and public education; the suspicion of the effects of 'too much' advertising (or too much TV); the need for governments to communicate

their decisions to their subjects, all of these were equally operative ideologies within broadcasting. To some extent, they still are. In recent years, however, the ideology of 'audience' has been able to colonise these other ideologies. Crucially for Britain, the BBC has spent the last ten years quantifying their commitment to public broadcasting. The decision by BBC executives to enter into a 'ratings war' with ITV can now be seen to have had this effect. The initial justification for the BBC's acceptance of the audience rating figure was a purely financial and political calculation. Executives announced, 'Philosophically, we would be unable to justify the continuance of the licence fee system if our share of the audience was less than one third.' This was a tactical decision to defend the whole space of the BBC's multitudinous programme-making endeavours by launching a calculated 'mass' entertainment raft to support them. A decade later, the measure of the effectivity of a BBC programme is the audience numbers it gets, and the profile of that audience. No more is the diffuse and irredeemably middle-class notion of audience uplift mobilised to defend a particular programme. Nowadays, judgments of quality are delivered somewhat nervously or assertively, and backed up with a confident quotation of audience figures: 'I think it was a good programme, really...and it got two million.' Public service broadcasting is now judged in terms of how many of the public were served.<sup>4</sup>

The ideology of audience reigns supreme. The statistical apparatus that supports it is massive compared to the information that is routinely gathered in relation to other institutions of representation (cinema or magazines for instance). However, it is woefully inadequate in relation to the magnitude of its task and to the importance of the political arena in which those statistics are used. The statistics are being asked to do the impossible, to prove the validity of scheduling decisions, the quality and construction of programmes, the future of genres of programme-making, the size of budgets, the shape and bias of news. It's all rather a lot for a basic sample of 7000 sets to carry.

The fundamental assumptions about the TV audience which batten onto this statistical information are that the audience is a mass grouping, easily bored and irredeemably generalist in its outlook. For Channel 4, where this seems to be the operative assumption of many of the staff, such an idea creates particular problems. It imposes the regime of address that I began to describe in *Visible Fictions*: the presentation of images and sounds that are already rendered intelligible to the glance of a viewer whose interest is not necessarily very great. The viewer is constructed by the programme and its strategies of direct address as the 'ordinary citizen', separate from the world of problems and spectacles that are brought into their home. Channel 4's commitment to providing programmes for minorities and from minorities cuts right across this definition. The most painful point of conflict between these two conceptions occurs with the Tuesday late-evening slot devoted to ethnic minorities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Alasdair Milne, BBC Director General, on the Corporation's Direct Broadcast Satellite plans: 'It will be available to everyone who pays for it, and this possibility of universality gives it a public service ring.' *The Guardian*, July 25, 1983.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy's analysis of the same programmes, 'C4 - Bridgehead or Bantustan?', *Screen*, July-October 1983, vol 24 nos 4-5, is based around the assumption that the programmes try to address both a general and a specific audience. Perhaps my analytic tendencies take me in the direction of a formalist approach to this problem.

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Alternative Tuesdays at around 11pm are devoted to magazine programmes with studio links: *Eastern Eye* (whose eye looks no further East than the Indian sub-continent) and *Black on Black*. Though different enough in some ways, both are produced by one of the major ITCA companies (London Weekend), and both exemplify Channel 4's problems of address to their presumed audience. For both programmes have a highly defined minority audience, identifiable by both race and culture, and politically organised around these identities. However, these programmes do not adopt the voices of those minorities. They do not speak from their culture to their culture. Instead, their presenters and reporters act out the attitudes and styles of conventional TV current affairs. Occasionally, nervously, they drop in an 'ethnic' reference, usually in the form of a joke, using an isolated word of patois or of Hindi. The sole exception is *Black on Black*'s comic, Victor Romero Evans, whose scripted monologue is very close to incomprehensibility for this standard English speaker. It comes as a joyful moment of cultural assertion, often with a heavy left-wing political message, yet it is also a poignant moment: one stand-up comic adrift in a sea of TV comprehensibility. For both programmes have been constructed for the general TV audience, not only as accessible to that audience but as addressed to them. For viewers from the majority ethnic group in Britain, *Eastern Eye* and *Black on Black* do not give the feeling of being an interloper, watching something intended for other people. These two Channel 4 programmes assume a general audience, rather than speaking from a culture to that culture.

The results for the programmes and their potential are devastating. *Eastern Eye* is known in the Asian community as 'Eastern Spy'. The ability of the programmes to undertake investigative reporting is severely compromised because they are addressed to the general TV audience. They are talking about a community to outsiders: their description of the occasional dubious Asian businessman thus is seen as a betrayal of a community's good image to the predominantly hostile British culture, rather than as a useful piece of TV journalism.

*Black on Black* and *Eastern Eye* are the most acute examples of the problems that the general TV ideology of 'audience' constructs for Channel 4 programmes. For *Visions: Cinema*, the concept of audience has been used to launch specific criticisms of the programmes' address, particularly in its use of non-standard voices, or of 'amateurish' presenters. It has also supported the occasional criticism that the programme is 'boring' or 'too serious', too preoccupied with questions of context and financial structure, and not enough with conveying a sense of entertainment.

In all of these criticisms, the audience who are adduced are always other people: the particular viewer proposing the criticism never admits that it is based on her or his own TV viewing habits and assumptions. The 'audience' is other people, other people who watch the programme while it is transmitted, rather than as an off-air recording; other people

who abhor complexity; other people who invariably use TV (even the marginal, late-night TV of the *Visions: Cinema* slot) as a source of entertainment spiced with information.

The whole use of the concept of 'audience', the dependence on the statistics, mark the real isolation of broadcasters from their viewers. There is no other medium in which practitioners know so little about the conditions of consumption of their work, or of how it is used. The direct contacts, via duty officer logs or letters, are too random (i.e. too motivated) to create such a feeling. Making TV programmes carries a real sense of firing something off into the void. In such a context, some programme-makers argue that the concept of 'audience' provides a brake on the aspirations of some of their number (usually identified with the arts programmes) to make wilfully 'self-indulgent' programmes, whatever that term might mean. However, Channel 4 was intended to be a different kind of TV channel from those which are dominated by such crass assumptions. More than anything else, it needs a means of circumventing the assumptions about 'audience' by reaching out towards its viewers. This would be far more than the current, underfunded, educational outreach, which consists almost entirely of leaflets following up specific programmes (e.g. *Visions: Cinema* on Godard and Hong Kong cinema), and of *See 4*, a quarterly paper addressed to teachers.

Contact can only come when viewers become organised, so that the current gripes that every TV viewer has can be articulated into useful criticisms. Channel 4 has not developed such an organisation. Its timid attempts to dip a toe in the water stirred up such a storm of criticism that they are not likely to be repeated. Perhaps the Channel 4 Users' Group<sup>6</sup> will be able to provide a form in which shouting at the TV, or switching it off, are not the only forms of criticism open to viewers.

Channel 4 was set up amid many brave statements about the need for changes in TV's attitudes towards its audience. It was perhaps inevitable that many of these should be forgotten during the long and difficult task of establishing this new broadcasting agency. Certainly the relative success of this latter aspect of the Channel 4 enterprise was thrown sharply into focus by the drastic organisational failure that overtook TV-AM in its early weeks during Spring 1983. TV-AM's task of setting up commercial breakfast-time TV was by no means as complex as Channel 4's, either. However, I am still surprised that Channel 4 has not been more able to shift the established conceptions of the TV audience. There has been no campaign by the Channel itself to do so, and the relationships that have developed between the Channel and its independent suppliers have made it almost impossible for them to undertake such a campaign, if they even want to. Yet this campaign is one of the most urgent tasks in the coming struggle to prevent Channel 4 from becoming ITV 2.

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<sup>6</sup> The Channel 4 Users' Group can be contacted at 9 Poland Street, London W1.

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# BETWEEN LOVE AND LABOUR

RICHARD KWIETNIOWSKI REVIEWS  
GODARD'S 'SCENARIO OF THE FILM  
PASSION'

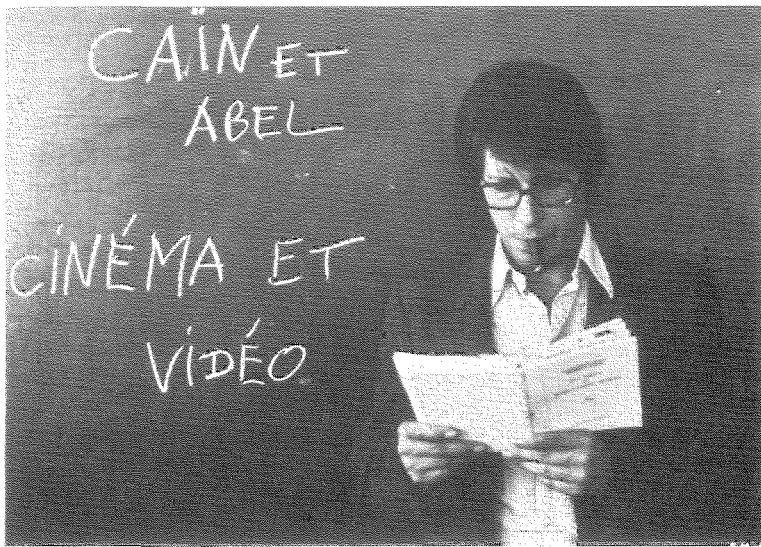
ON MAY 11, 1983, Channel 4's *Visions* transmitted the Godard video originally made for Swiss-French TV, on the process of the script for the director's latest cinema release, *Passion*. The video was sandwiched between an interview programme (produced by Large Door) assessing the status and merits of the Godard cinema and a transmission of *Vivre Sa Vie*.

If the major obscenity of TV is its over-familiarity—its place in the home, its smug assumptions about the singularity of audience response—Channel 4 has already demonstrated its value in redressing the balance by voicing minorities as producers and consumers, buying and commissioning alternative product which lacks aggressive populism (made with capital but without it as a motive), and providing the framework for programmes like *Visions* and the *Friday Alternative* which show an awareness of the mechanics of mass communication and their part within it.

Neither Godard's earlier work for French TV nor anything remotely like it had appeared on British TV before. But the importance of the transmission of his *Scenario du Film 'Passion'* is precisely its placement *between* the conventions of talking heads and the scheduling of an old film. Godard, unusually, raised backing for the production of both the feature film and a video concerned with the making of the film's script *as a process* which, although anterior to the completed film, bears the traces of work invested in that process to completion. This is, for once, video in its own right, but it is also TV that surprises in its look and in its distancing of completed product: *process as product* not product in progress.

## I. Telecine

- A. in a cinema  
people are many (together)  
to be alone in front of the screen.
- B. in an apartment linked to a TV aerial  
people are alone to be many (together)  
in front of the screen.<sup>1</sup>



*Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)*

Consider, on the other hand, the opposite experience, the experience of TV, which also shows films: nothing, no fascination; the darkness is dissolved, the anonymity repressed, the space is familiar, organised (by furniture and familiar objects), tamed... the eroticisation of space is foreclosed. Television condemns us to the Family, whose household utensil it has become just as the hearth once was, flanked by its predictable communal stewing pot in times past.<sup>2</sup>

*What have you done with your brother?*

Video, Godard's *Cain* to cinema's *Abel*, repeats its early history, the regime of the entrepreneur: the rock promo, *ET* pirates,<sup>3</sup> the exploitable family audience. Cinema is devoured in the process. There are more VTRs per capita in Britain than in Japan or America, a statistic comprehensible only in relation to the (mythical) excellence of British TV and the abusive misjudgement of cinema audiences by the two major distributor-exhibitors.

Video stands between cinema and TV. It regulates cinema through

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from a document by Sonimage produced for the Mozambique Government, quoted in Colin McCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, London, Macmillan/British Film Institute, 1980, p 139.

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Upon Leaving the Movie Theater', trans from *Communications* no 23, 1975, by Bertrand Augst and Susan White, in *University Publishing* no 6, 1979, p 3.

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<sup>3</sup> 'The question remains, did the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester have a pirate video of *ET*? Interviewed on BBC2 beside her grandmother, Princess Alice, three-year-old Lady Rose Windsor said the film did not make her cry because her eight-year-old brother, the Earl of Ulster, "turned it off".' - *Broadcast*, May 9, 1983, p 9.

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TV, diminishing its screen size, aspect ratio and image quality. It imposes Home Box Office, privatised consumption around the family hearth.



# VIDEO

SMALL AND LARGE SCREEN COLOUR TV • TELETEXT TV • BLACK AND WHITE TV



Father's feet, *Little Women*...

TV relies quietly on repetition in sequence, a never ending *syntagma*: scheduling, commercials, news bulletins, annual events; all interlock as yearly, weekly, daily, hourly cycles: a false plentitude. Video principally states its use-value through repetition, stopping the flow to repeat favoured moments, favoured episodes, favoured films: Ken and Deirdre,



the wedding of Charles and Di, the beheading in *Evil Dead*. All these become familiar objects as domesticated spectacle.

In production, video is also used largely as a carrier, to sell product in commercials and rock promos. It is as if its immediacy renders it (as apparatus, as medium) intangible. This is possibly its greatest asset as the cuckoo in cinema's nest, but also its potential as an intermediary, rather than auxiliary, medium. Its elimination of two cinematic processes, collective consumption and laboratory processing, suggests a certain intimacy with both apparatus and image: immediate playback, instant erasure; repeat the experiment differently at no extra cost. Godard talks of video as a tool for practicing, owning your means of production. The resting place of his first video camera was the bedside table.

*What would it be like for a taxi driver or a pilot if they only worked once or twice a year like film-makers do?*<sup>4</sup>

*I don't know what the rules were in England but when I began to make movies in France only the camera-operator and the director were authorised to look into the viewfinder.*<sup>5</sup>

Video is closer to sound technology. Record, playback and edit are stages that lead one into the other without interruption. The digital edit from *source* to *record* replaces the laboratory conversions of negative to positive and rough-cut to answer print. The video image is always positive but never finite. The little video factory offers a further luxury, the telecine<sup>6</sup>, (which Godard apparently had to struggle for) the apparatus which realises video's potential for quotation, converting any image on film to its flow.

The film *Numero Deux* constantly poses the opposition factory/landscape. It closes with Godard in his editing suite, slumped in exhaustion over the apparatus as if he has reached the point of impotence in his own factory. The completed film *Passion* turns around the co-relation of *love* and *labour*, *work to love*, *love to work*. The *Scenario* of *Passion* stages the movement between love and labour as a passion for sound and image put to work. Its video format carries the seeing of the script as a series of possibilities, or probabilities out of possibilities which lie between its traces of starting-points (paintings by the masters) and its traces of finishing-points (telecined extracts from *Passion*). It is a script then, imagised between, which defies the Producer's Law of the written script as the investment in story, the major clause in the contract of cinema.

*Instead of writing a script, we are going to shoot it. So when we look for a star for it, maybe, and they say 'May I read the script,' we say 'No but you can see it.' It's called 'The Story' and it deals with the question 'Why do we need a story?' ... Like scientists, who don't write the experiment before doing it.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Godard quoted in 'An Interview with Jean-Luc Godard', *Framework* no 21, Summer 1983, p 8.

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<sup>5</sup> Godard quoted in Colin MacCabe, *op cit*, p 133.

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<sup>6</sup> 'FLYING SPOT SCANNER: Technique which uses a displayed TV raster and photomultiplier pick-up tubes to provide registration-error free colour picture from films, slides or captions.' – from Angus Robertson (ed), *International Video Year Book*, Blandford Press, Poole, 1982, p 200.

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<sup>7</sup> Godard quoted in 'Godard For Himself', *Framework* no 13, Autumn 1980, p 8.

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<sup>8</sup> All unattributed quotations in bold typeface here and below are from the *Scenario du Film Passion*.

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## II. Movement

... find a movement ...<sup>8</sup>

The movement of the *Scenario* is Godard's address behind and in front of fragments from the process of and towards *Passion*. He sits smoking in a video editing suite, sometimes addressing a camera to his left (**Good evening friend and foe**) and sometimes speaking with his back to a second camera, his outline silhouetted against a white screen beyond the editing controls. Two monitors are visible bearing this camera's image, one on his left and one beyond the white screen, visible to him only if he looks in the monitor to his left to see an image including himself and him looking at himself.



*Scenario du Film 'Passion'*



*Scenario du Film 'Passion'*

Telecined material sometimes fills the entire screen alone, but is more often superimposed under/over the studio shot with its image intensified where it overlaps the studio screen. The whole telecined image sometimes appears only on the smaller screen, and is at one point *doubled* with the same image also on the entire screen. Godard both addresses the image (against the tradition of the newscaster who, as he points out, turns his or her back on the image) and enunciates it, consumer and producer at once; he is the watcher watched – or the conductor Stokowski in Disney's *Fantasia*. He is thus inscribed into the movement of the script as the *other text* of the completed film: 'Godard' as the configuration within a certain type of cinema which guarantees a certain continuity, progression, *movement* in relation to his previous work.

**... there is movement, a girl running between two cars ...**

The dynamics of a story in cinema depend upon movement, the movement of actants paralleled, paced and centred by the camera. It is a movement towards contact, bringing people together to touch, in word, kiss, sex. There are arrivals, departures, rendezvous, all of which play a crucial part in *Passion*. Actants chase, pursue, evade each other in cars, on foot, within and between locations. The flow must build to coherence.

**... as there's action, Jerzy will play an actor ... as he's an actor, there'll be action ...**

The actors, bodies in suspension, move into and out of certain constructions like the curved sweep of Venus crowning Ariadne (watched by Bacchus) in the Tintoretto allegory which is the starting point of the *Scenario*. Godard intercuts it on his screen with a still of Isabelle, forlorn and undermined (the connection being, perhaps, the prize of liberty and a man between two women). The intercut is not a clearly defined splice, but rather a digitally controlled *blend* of the two images in sequence, a search for connections, for a movement out. The actants – here familiar from other contexts, the stars of art cinema<sup>9</sup> – are the bearers of the story, accustomed to performing the movement out of script to a level of refined completeness, to the take that will satisfy the script. They are not accustomed to a movement from the other side, *towards* a script.

**... I talked of something I could see, but they really saw themselves ...**

Actors, stars, seeing themselves seen, following movements from the script with the image behind them. Stars validate the product; the familiarity of their repertoire of affects adds weight to the movement back and forth. They make their entrance; we stay with them; their movement is what counts.

**... someone comes; the action starts; the script proceeds ...**

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<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Huppert,  
Hanna Schygulla,  
Michel Piccoli,  
Jerzy  
Radziwilowicz.

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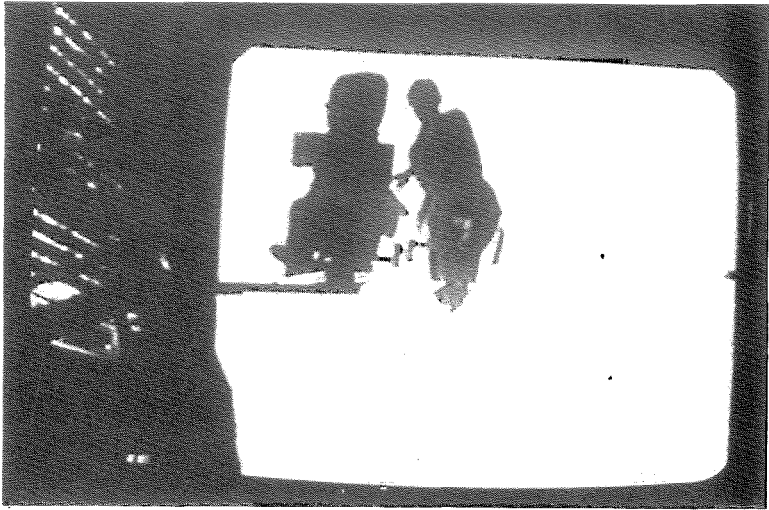
<sup>10</sup> Main Agreement dated January 1, 1982, between the Independent TV Companies and British Actors Equity Association, p 17.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p 19.

They are the currency put to work and circulated according to certain controls, the contract of *script*, the contract of *engagement*:

#### *FLYING OR BEING LIFTED ON HOISTS*

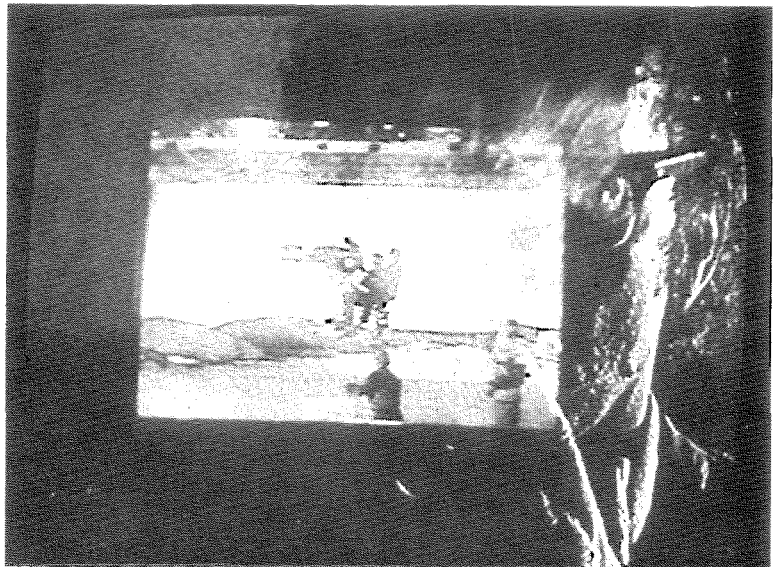
- I. *In the event that an artist is required to fly or to be hoisted on free-standing lifts, as provided for under this Clause, and this activity is not made known to the artist prior to the signing of the Form of Engagement, then the artist shall have the right to refuse to undertake such activity.*
- II. *An artist required by a Company during the course of an Engagement to fly or to be hoisted on free-standing lifts shall be entitled to a once and for all payment in respect of such engagement . . .*<sup>10</sup>



*Scenário du Film 'Passion'*

#### *FLASHBACKS*

*An artist whose performance in a programme is subsequently incorporated into another programme as a flashback shall receive payment as follows . . .*<sup>11</sup>



*Scenário du Film 'Passion'*

Godard's love/loathing of cinema includes the familiarity, the corpularity, of stars. In the *Scenario* he kisses the image of Isabelle and then Jerzy on his screen. He stands at one point to become an outline between, on top of, Isabelle and Jerzy, the term that brings them together. There is even the occasional correlation between a movement on screen by an extra (the cannon-fodder of cinema) and his own: the first tableau ends with the virgin from El Greco's 'Assumption of the Virgin Mary' raising her fingers to her lips; Godard then begins his address to the camera with his hand – and cigar – hovering over his mouth.

The *Scenario of Passion* traces movement through the great moments of humanity in the work of the masters towards their dynamism in metaphor; a search for justice. Jerzy's camera (he is making a film, also called *Passion*, of tableaux vivants of the masters' work) remains in the studio, endlessly circling and entering the tableaux to settle on their light sources, as crew and cast try and figure out the film's status – as story, as lie, as truth, or as 'profoundly calculated approximations of verisimilitude'. But Godard's camera seeks to shed light<sup>12</sup> through making actants figure in the flow of sound and image as something more than themselves: boss, film director; worker, woman – at the crossroads between reality and metaphor, as he puts it. The *hapax*<sup>13</sup> is re-articulated as a circulation of figures out of figurative art in a process between love and labour: personal relations, industrial relations. Tableaux of the film's four stars in context are cut into the opening shot of a jet stream across a radiant blue sky: Isabelle in the factory; Isabelle with Jerzy; Hanna dressing in front of her husband, the boss. The two films (Godard's, Jerzy's), the two locations (film set, factory), are linked metaphorically: the film set is also a factory, the site of injustice and exploitation. The *Scenario* clearly demonstrates Godard's awareness of his power as the boss but his relation to his product is devotional, a kind of *believer* attempting to shed light on injustice by way of the image but also as it exists in the image. Unlike Jerzy, he does not turn his back.

The movement, carried by music, comes to skirt narrative, a story that comes to dive in and out of the conventions of cinema which, in the Godard cinema, are there to be taken for granted and then undermined or punned (visually or orally) onto another plane. He provides a list of film-makers who are, like him, exiled from Hollywood: Wim (Wenders), Chantal (Akerman), Anne-Marie (Miéville – his collaborator), Jacques (Rivette). These are names from the so-called 'second avant-garde', who work in large-scale production (Rivette through the sympathies and skills of producer Tchalgadjieff; Akerman through sheer tenacity) to alter and question it, exiling stars and stories by using them to construct something unfixed by their domination. The subject of Wenders' *The State of Things* is also the Producer's Law, the film promoted with the line 'They didn't want to kill him, they only wanted a story ...' – a subject that renders the film suitably incomplete.

*I am myself both Swiss and French. I live on both sides of the frontier. I am a frontier dweller twice over; always a foreigner on either side of the border; which is, I think, like the situation of cinema: communication passing from one thing to another, never being fixed in one position.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'GODARD:  
"What about a problem or a difficulty? Can that be illuminated too?" ARNAUD:  
"For example, when there's an investigation ... there's an expression, we shed some light ..."', from *France/Tour/Detour /Deux/Enfants 2*.

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<sup>13</sup> 'As Jean-Louis Schefer has reminded us, the only valid linguistic analogy that we can make for the painting is that it is a "hapax" – the term used for a word in classical Greek literature which has only one recorded usage in the whole of the known corpus.' Stephen Bann, 'On Two Recent Paintings by Stephen Edlich' in *Stephen Edlich: Recent Work 1979-80*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, 1981, p. 12.

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<sup>14</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, 'Sauve Qui Peut ... Godard (Fragments)' trans by Martyn Auty and Ginette Vinceandeau from *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 215 for *Framework* no 13, Autumn 1980, p. 10.

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### III. Work

As love could be linked with labour, this would be the main theme.

Labour of love; love of labour: both *Passion* and the *Scenario* play with this connection, with the production of cinema always there as its problematic realisation. The conceit of the project is the bringing together of these apparently oppositional terms which initially appears to trivialise the oppression of the working class and, in a suspiciously French way, to amplify the fecundities of love. But Godard's concern is for the status of the image in relation to this opposition. The problem of producing *just* images of oppression is articulated in work in progress by Mike Leggett:



Photograph of a garment factory from the forthcoming video, *Image Con Text Two*.

... Control of focus was better effected in the second plate so the centre of interest is the people in the middle of the factory floor, the women and their supervisor. The 36 women and girls visible work with irons supplied with steam from pipes running the length of the rows of benches, finishing clothes on the top floor of a laundry or garment factory. The male figure is the only one seated and the only one wearing business rather than working clothes. He could be the supervisor, the manager or even the proprietor.

The photographer inadvertently left his finger prints in the soft emulsion of the bottom left-hand corner of the plate. His relation to his subject can only be imagined. He could be the factory's proprietor making a record of his property (for insurance purposes) or conversely he could be a photographer wanting to record the lives of working people with little power. Artisans with skills in the field of mechanical reproduction (and therefore mass dissemination) continued a tradition throughout the 19th-century of enfranchising the sectors of society which had no access to such fields of influence. But the artisan and the particular medium, whether stone, steel plate, silver halide, gelatin emulsion or, more contemporaneously, magnetic recording tape, compound the error with the disenfranchised being objectified instead as subjects.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> From the voiceover of the video, *Image Con Text Two*.

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(Consider also an extraordinary moment in Jan Worth's *Doll's Eye*, when the film's equation 'Classical music for oppressor, rock music for oppressed' seems to become unhinged: a still shot of women at work in a typing pool accompanied by *classical* music. The shot is almost over before the eye searching the frame finally alights upon the presence justifying the (controlling) presence of the music: furthest from the camera – and hence occupying the least amount of screen space – sits a man reading the paper. The boss controls image, and sound.)

The *Scenario* includes a shot of women in a factory behind sewing machines, intercut (blended) with the Tintoretto painting ... **to see if this working woman's gestures had some connection with the gestures of love I planned in the film.** This startling juxtaposition sets up a precise correlation between the oppression of the working class and of women, and how both are oppressed in representation, one through absence and the other through proliferation. The real gives way to the metaphoric: an actress plays a worker; a woman plays a woman. Jerzy's tableaux concentrates on the display (the passive representation) of women (Ingres' 'Turkish Bath'; Goya's 'Maja Desnuda', obscured by men shifting camera equipment) and the conquering of armies (Goya's '3rd of May': Napoleon's infantrymen execute Spanish patriots). A half-naked woman extra, led between costumed guards and TV camera, tries to escape from both the tableau vivant of Delacroix's 'Taking of Constantinople by the Crusaders' and the film set. It is cinema that draws the worlds of love and labour together, lifting workers from one factory to work as extras in another, producing love in furtive sex off-set and in the devotional construction of sound and image on-set.

Towards the end of the *Scenario*, in a telecine from *Passion* that does not appear in the completed film, Jerzy and Isabelle talk in her room. Jerzy says, in Polish, **Let's start at the beginning.** Isabelle stammers **Why**

**have you abandoned me?** Godard interjects **Jerzy will speak two languages; Isabelle must have two to reply.** The stammer is the third term of **inner and outer turmoil**, a symptom of the alienating nature of language. Like Isabelle, women are frequently given problems with language, with articulating needs and desires in cinema. The Hollywood melodrama: Lucy in Ophuls' *Reckless Moment* seeks a loan to protect her family from blackmailers, all because her husband is away working in Europe. In a loan company office she hesitates: 'I want to *make* . . . no, *have*, a loan.' Which is it: active or passive? Which is she? From the complementary European cinema of Ophuls, Louise in *Madame de* . . . cannot express her love for Donati. She closes the door after him and whispers 'Je ne t'aime pas; je *ne* t'aime pas', voicing not the denial of her love but the denial of greater forces to permit it: 'Je *ne peut* pas t'aimer . . .'

Cinema, designated for the supremacy of the male gaze, tends to condemn female desire to framing rather than voicing itself. This is nowhere more evident than in the extremity of the Hitchcock cinema. In *Vertigo* Midge watches in despair as Scotty's obsession with Madeleine grows. As Madeleine models herself on a portrait of her ancestor Carlotta – and it is precisely this neurosis, the neurosis of the frame, that fascinates Scotty – Midge makes a copy of it but with her own face, complete with glasses to regain his attention. He leaves shaken to the core. Midge takes up her brush and obliterates her face in the painting, finally throwing her brush at her reflection in the window. Obliterated from his gaze, from his desire, she exits from the film.

**... just a little working girl dreaming of a little justice ...**

Isabelle has lost her job without compensation; Jerzy is on the point of abandoning her for Hanna. Women in representation, women at work, women at work in representation: the Berwick Street Collective's *Night Cleaners*, women working poorly unionised, unfairly waged, in addition to raising a family – a social and economic issue. Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, Bruxelles 1080*: a woman's movements and gestures performed, repeated, within the oppression of a domestic routine that happens to include afternoon prostitution; a ritual of confinement between men – clients' visits, her son, her dead husband; but a ritual which nevertheless builds a steady rapport between her and her space and the process of watching every detail of the movement of the mother – 'lowest in the Hollywood hierarchy of images'.

Godard has concentrated repeatedly on the prostitute as the sign of male desire and a commodity item of the commerce that also produces cinema. For the first time in the Godard cinema *Passion* features a woman in a socio-economic role that is not determined by her sexuality. Her sexuality is welded to her oppression as a worker. Godard has been criticised for conflating women and their sexuality, which leaves his 'masculine investigation' intact. In the *Scenario* he is very much the masculine artist, ruminating over metaphor and reality rather than art and life (where is the difference?) but it continues the increasing investment



of him as a site of contradiction in his own work: love to work; work to love; love of cinema; loathing of cinema. The 'masculine investigation' is now founded on uncertainty, on an awareness of the repression of homosexuality, on a re-articulation of women as the sexual and social body of oppression. It proposes a cinema of *doubt*, seeking justice, seeking light in order to shed light: a process towards departure.

#### IV. Music

*... nothing permits us to locate the slightest tableau in the musical text, except by reducing it to a subservience to drama; nothing permits us to cut out in it the slightest fetish, except by debasing it through the use of trite melodies.*<sup>16</sup>

**I was always alone, confronting that purity, that beach with no sea... then one day a sound came – the sound of Mozart bought at an airport.**

The tradition of music in cinema keeps it subservient to drama; a flow according to a certain hierarchy: it accompanies. It can weld itself to either noise or speech (steam train noise 'taken over' by Max Steiner's score for *Beyond the Forest*; speech becoming song in the musical). Metz talks of speech always *sticking out*, 'never altogether *in* the film, but always a little *ahead* of it'.<sup>17</sup> Music brings things together, smoothing the sequence, diegetically motivated.<sup>18</sup> It is the continuum over scene transitions, the back-up for certain responses (laughter, tension), pacing moments of suspension (actant in car between places), adding momentum (the kiss, horses charging), fixing the diegesis historically, geographically, ethnically, amplifying character psychology, carrying character and place in theme and motif.

This tradition has suffered in the hands of contemporary American cinema where the possibility of soundtrack sales produces disco music at every opportunity (connoting up-to-dateness, youthfulness, 'street credibility'). But place beside this a certain tradition in European art cinema which relies on classical music as an ennobling device, using the familiarity of the orchestral flow to carry images into the lyrical, the significant, the profound: the cinemas of Herzog, Tarkovsky, Syberberg; the assumption of an informed audience at a certain cultural juncture.

Godard's liking for music has always been evident but quickly became a device to be exploited and simultaneously assessed in its exploitation. An orchestrated melody of perhaps 30 seconds is repeated throughout *Le Mepris*, sometimes opening a scene, sometimes closing one, sometimes placed arbitrarily in the middle. Each time it seems to *accompany* a different emotion on Bardot's face: a malleable presence. Sound becomes unhinged, unrepressed.

*Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)* begins with Paul banging his hotel wall for a woman opera singer to stop. The noise continues in the following shot as he passes through the hotel foyer (still placed diegetically: it is conceiv-

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', trans by Stephen Heath in *Image, Music, Text*, Glasgow, Fontana/Collins, 1977, p 70.

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Metz, *Film Language*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, p 54.

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<sup>18</sup> 'The sequence does not string the individual shots; it suppresses them.' – *ibid*, p 45.

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able that the sound remains audible). But the subsequent shot, of Paul descending an escalator in a shopping mall, unfixes it: the sound continues, distorted over the tannoy; the audience laughs. In the following scene, Paul rejects the homosexual advances of a hotel worker. The dual repression is set up, the male egos of Paul (Paul Godard: the name of the director's father) and of the subject of cinema, shaken slightly. Throughout the film women (always women, usually in cafés) sometimes look up and ask 'Where's the music coming from?'

In *Passion* classical music is the dominant (threatened only once, by Léo Ferré)

**... music lends its support ...**

but it rarely vanishes into accompaniment. It maintains a constant presence, sometimes pacing movement but more often enriching the status of sound, through repetition and through creating climaxes rarely paralleled in the image. It parallels the image not in synch but also not in opposition, by setting up movements and tableaux of its own: the recognition of a phrase; the prolongation of certain pieces, setting up rapports independent to the image, an other plenitude. This matches the pleasure in reflexivity of the entire film: the interior and exterior films *Passion*; Jerzy watching Hanna watch herself on a video monitor trying to sing in synch, in tune, with music.

Witness, in keeping with this, the ways in which Godard uses certain conventions of cinema: the exquisite slow motion sequences in *Sauve Qui Peut (La Vie)* (Godard's choice of title for the American release: *Slow Motion*). Isabelle rides a bike along a country lane, the first appearance of slow motion. Paul's lover, she is now donated as an object of fascination for us, to savour her body, her movement. This is deprived after the second slow motion sequence: Paul, watching his daughter play football (slow motion) talks to her instructor about the unfairness of fathers being unable to touch daughters as mothers can. The slow motion once again objectifies a woman 'over his shoulder' but this time entailing the repression of incest. A later sequence of a woman being slapped across the face is also slow motion: the lyrical convention of this technique is exposed as male objectification of women, a game cinema takes over as one of its own.

Motion, sound, colour: assumptions within the spectacle of cinema that are suddenly disrupted, exposed, un-synched. Godard has repeatedly lined the spectrum of the Tricolour across the screen. *Passion*, a film that deals ultimately with desertion/return as a cause and result of injustice, constantly relates that theme to the declaration of martial law in Poland through the presence of Wajda actor Radziwilowicz, the distant comments 'Have you heard what is happening in Poland?', and the frequent appearance of the red and white colours of the Polish flag, of Solidarność. The starting point of the *Scenario* is a woman

between two cars. The flowers she carries are red and white, which in the completed film are to be flung at the husband, the boss.

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p 144.

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## V. Story

*The cinema, which could have served a variety of uses, in fact is most often used to tell stories – to the extent that even supposedly nonnarrative films (short documentary films, educational films, etc) are governed essentially by the same semiological mechanisms that govern the feature films.*<sup>19</sup>

*There's a story between us. As with other people, the story comes out of him and goes back home into her. And there, inside, you loose track. And then the story reappears, a child is born, and you find that outside, in the outer world. And there, you can see again the story.*<sup>20</sup>

Personal memory of cinema is, like dreams, made up of details and situations. Stories remain, at best, half-remembered. And yet narrative cinema aligns everything to the story. Sound and image interrelate to make it central, to make its momentum prominent. Script and camera conspire to make its possibility probable. Producer and would-be consumers demand of Jerzy the story. But he lives out, rather than tells, several possible stories.

**People have the courage to live stories, but not invent and tell them.**

But Godard's story for *Passion* moves away from Jerzy's blockage, the tableaux – a wedge of artifact – to re-articulate them in other fields where movement is almost defined by the actants living different stories which collide and overlap.

**I began to see not the story, but two or three things in the story – faces, people, people moving, movement and places where this movement takes place – movement moves from one place to another.**

In the *Scenario* Godard talks of Mack Sennett, master of the chase with a sparcity of elements: cop (Keystone), bathing beauty (Mabel Normand), lover (a friend); the basis of the cinematic story: love's obstacles. The script arose, Godard suggests, through the need to account for money spent:

Each day cost money; the accountant wondered where the money went so he wrote: Bathing Beauty 100 Francs, Cop 50 Francs, Sweetheart 3 dollars. Gradually this became 'A cop falls for a bathing beauty being chased by her sweetheart.' Bookkeeping gave rise to the script, originally just a note of money to be spent.

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<sup>20</sup> from Godard's comic-strip script for *The Story*, quoted Colin MacCabe, *op cit*, p 164.

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Mack Sennett's *Between Showers*

The script dictates the expenditure of the story: parts large enough for stars; the costing of sets, crews, extras; the accountability of labour at every level. The *business* is seeing the script through into imagisation under budget, in the way Sam Fuller talks of manipulating crew and actors:

*... And I rehearse in that week at least 2 days with my whole crew. And we shoot every key scene in the picture without film ... And all the actors are acclimatized now. They're well-rehearsed. They know exactly what to do. It gives me a chance to introduce business ... I move all my props around ... And they never know, whenever they are to shoot a scene, when any business is added.*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Sam Fuller interviewed for *Movie*, Winter 1969-70, quoted in Jay Leyda (ed), *Voices of Film Experience*, London, Macmillan, 1977, p 157.

*Passion* then as a return to Sennett:

*... We have no scenario – we get an idea then follow the natural sequence of events until it leads up to a chase, which is the essence of our comedy.*<sup>22</sup>

**The story runs off in all directions: you run after it ...**

'I really had you there,' says Piccoli, the boss, in *Passion* as he drives into the women trying to picket outside the factory. Godard extends this in the *Scenario*: **the boss has things; to have something in the bank; to have someone....** *Passion* deals with control through possession on many levels: the bargaining and hassling that goes on between Jerzy and producer; the sparring with Hanna; the bosses clinging tenuously to creative, sexual and industrial control. Godard, the boss of *Passion*, con-

<sup>22</sup> Mack Sennett quoted in Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, and cited in *ibid*, p 427.

trois its backing, its *Scenario*, its birth, its release, its workers, but by eliminating the distance between script and story has tried to follow its directions according to the circulation of desire rather than money. It is the call for a cinema of desire, the desire for cinema, that alters by following traces and sheds light. Significantly, the completed film stops with movement, with a departure, a beginning, rather than an end.

**It's the girl I started with, but now I know where she's going.**

**A film about people deserting each other and returning home.**

**A factory girl is sacked by her boss. She falls in love with a foreigner come to make a film in the area. Then the boss's wife also falls in love with the foreigner. And he for his part cannot find a subject for his film although there are dozens around him. That's it: your script is finished ... and now you're in the very heart of it ('la region centrale').**

## VI. Passion



*Scenario du Film 'Passion'*

*... reportedly the spectators who insist on sitting closest to the screen are children and cinephiles...*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, 'On Leaving the Movie Theater', op cit.

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*Scenario du Film 'Passion'*

...like a mother she waits: you are her child. You can tell her everything...



*Scenario du Film 'Passion'*

*In Six Fois Deux* you seem to suggest that it's the division of labour that is the original sin.

*It's not a sin but a curse. Even in the last film we made a joke of the division between video and camera equipment. It's like Cain and Abel. 'What have you done with your brother?' I don't think it's the division of labour but a division of love and labour. Love is labour and you say that a woman who is having a child—you say that she is in labour. It's not division of labour but division of love and labour. There is a division between love and labour but they are two aspects of the one thing. And they say it's two different things but there's one thing with two different moments or states. There is division and they shouldn't be divided—they should be together. And if they were together it would be a multiplication not a division.<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Godard interviewed in Colin MacCabe, *op cit*, p 157.

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With thanks to Mike Leggett and Frank Passingham for photographic preparation.

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# COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING AND THE BRITISH LEFT

IAN CONNELL REPLIES  
TO NICHOLAS GARNHAM

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Garnham, 'Public Service versus the Market', *Screen* January/February 1983, vol 24 no 1, pp 6-27. (Recently Garnham accepted full-time secondment to the Greater London Council's Economic Policy Unit. He will advise the GLC for one year on communications policy, including cable.)

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IN 'Public Service versus the Market'<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Garnham has made a case against the privately financed introduction of new communications technologies that will no doubt find considerable support within left wing circles and among those who see their introduction as yet another nail in the coffin of 'Culture'. In debunking the kind of wild speculation about the potential of, say, cable systems Garnham has made a number of observations that may well be received as just the sort of common sense that is much needed in this context. Certainly he is justly critical of, for example, the claim that this collection of hardware will bring about a revolution in communications on a par with that said to have been effected by the introduction of printing presses. As he argues, such is a romantic view in displaying a scant regard for either the nature of the proposals that have actually been made by the various interested parties, or even for the nature of the present structures of broadcasting within which the new technologies will be deployed in the first instance.

It is Garnham's own account of these structures and of what he sees as the present situation of broadcasting that will make his fairly negative and pessimistic assessment of the potential of the various systems seem so convincingly realistic. A number of strategic consequences follow from this account, which however realistic they may seem, remain questionable, not least the proposed defence of 'public service'. This pro-



posal is quite consistent with that critical tradition within which Garnham writes. But on this occasion his advocacy of the position, and indeed, his suggestion that there should be an expansion of public service to counteract the expanding activities of market forces is a little troubled, and as a consequence he would have the left defend, not the practice so much as an *ideal* of, 'public service' broadcasting. This idealism is somewhat surprising from one usually so explicit about his commitment to marxist materialism. He has been forced into it, however, for at least the following two reasons.

First, as Garnham observes, public *service* broadcasting has come to be associated in the popular imagination with public *sector* broadcasting, with, in other words, the BBC. Such an association is not altogether 'good news'. It causes problems because the BBC's track record has been such as to disqualify it as the kind of 'socially responsive, politically accountable' broadcasting that one imagines Garnham would like to see established. As he himself has pointed out, the BBC has frequently been anything but responsive to criticism, and, at times, grossly insensitive to people's expressed interests and needs, even when, it should be added, these interests and needs have not been mediated by a critical intelligentsia. Moreover, while the BBC may still enjoy a reputation for dealing with 'serious matters' in an impartial and objective way (indeed, its reputation for so doing may well have been enhanced by its posture in the face of heavy criticism during the Falklands affair), it is feared this will be insufficient to sustain it against the onslaught from the new, high-tech goodies when they come, or come more cheaply than at present. Given this fear, and the BBC's rather shady past, Garnham must 'stress that the historical practices of supposedly public service institutions, such as the BBC, do not necessarily correspond to the full potential of public service and may indeed . . . be actively in opposition to the development of those potentials'<sup>2</sup>.

The second main reason for Garnham's defence of an ideal has to do with the devaluation of the mobilising power of the official left's (i.e., the Labour Party and 'the organised labour movement') panacea – nationalisation or state control. As Garnham is aware there has been 'a widespread loss of faith in the statist solution'<sup>3</sup>. Put thus, however, is to present the 'loss of faith' as the problem rather than the apparent solution. In any case, the recent history of the new right's success and of the 'unofficial' left's none too successful attempts to formulate meaningful alternatives, clearly demonstrates the existence of popular resistance to the precise forms that state intervention has taken in this country. To the extent that public service broadcasting has come to be connected with these forms of intervention, then it can only be defended with some kind of qualification. To do otherwise could too easily be interpreted as, in fact, supporting the continuation of a system of broadcasting 'as centralised, bureaucratic, inefficient (and) arrogantly insensitive to the people's needs'<sup>4</sup> as the BBC and other branches of the civil service have proved until now.

But, however hard Nicholas Garnham has tried to dissociate his ideal

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p 24.

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p 21.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

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of public service from the practice of the BBC, the overall effect of his piece is, paradoxically, to reinforce the connection. (A symptom of this is his inability to specify just how the ideal might be reconsidered.) In the end, it looks very much as if we are being asked to accept, with due reservation, the BBC as the model for future developments – which is really rather an odd conclusion given the convincing case that Garnham has made for rejecting the BBC as such. The apparent inevitability of this drift back to the BBC has little to do with the ‘crisis of imagination’<sup>5</sup> he has conjured up to cover over his difficulties in providing any solid alternatives that might just be implemented. It has rather more to do with the kind of assumptions that he, and indeed many others, have made concerning the apparent differences between the public and the private sectors of broadcasting and about the latter’s supposed impact upon popular cultural formations.

The prospect of new broadcasting technologies, introduced, financed and controlled by commercial interests has stirred up many of the left’s darkest fears and suspicions about the impact of commercial broadcasting. Garnham, for instance, views the proposed technologies above all as functions of economic processes, and therefore as an ‘expansion of price and profit, of commodity exchange, as the dominating mode of organisation in yet another area of cultural production’<sup>6</sup>. Then, following what is by now virtually an instinct, he argues that this further stage in the ‘industrialisation of culture’ and the ‘colonisation of leisure’ is quite contrary to the development of a more ‘socially responsive and politically accountable, diverse mode of cultural interchange in the electronic sphere’<sup>7</sup>. It is the reiteration of this assumed opposition that ultimately drives Garnham back to offering as an alternative some kind of revised BBC.

Reduced to basics this case rests on an opposition between commodity exchange on the one hand and cultural production on the other. According to this almost folkloric wisdom, either you can pursue and make profits, or you can make culturally responsive ‘products’ (‘artefacts’ is usually the word used): it is deemed impossible to do both at once. Indeed commercial concerns sap and eventually destroy cultural energies. Within the terms of this perspective, broadcasting is considered to be essentially an instance of cultural production, albeit of somewhat lower status than really ‘authentic’ cultural pastimes. In its ideal state, it is a signifying or almost aesthetic practice. But, unfortunately, capitalist modes of production being what they are (or, rather, what they seem to be), external economic concerns have been allowed to invade this sphere and of late have been positively encouraged to intensify this invasion by a Conservative government scrabbling around for something, anything, that might serve as a good, industrial success story. This assertion and encouragement of economic interests is taken to have been disastrous. Not only has it brought about a multiple cultural decline but it has contained, set limits to, exerted pressure on and closed off projects that might otherwise have been pursued.

So deeply ingrained is this sense of opposition and its associated con-

notations (only some of which I have sketched in here) that even the empirical evidence quoted by Garnham himself is not sufficient to raise doubts about its adequacy. In short, the commercial companies have become *bêtes noires* for the left. In its cultural discourses the commercial sector in general functions as the inverse of all that is good; in relation to broadcasting, it is used as the opposite of all that responsive and accountable broadcasting should be. Deep down the left continues to think of it as nothing more than a licence to print money, on an ever expanding basis. In comparisons, then, the BBC can seem positively wonderful. When set against this image of the commercial broadcasting companies, or even worse, those transglobal corporations with a base in hardware, now beginning to dabble in software, the BBC comes to appear as the flawed (biased or partial, a bit dull and snooty) but perfectable expression of the ideal of public service. And why is it flawed? Because, as we all know, it has been *forced* to compete, increasingly at a disadvantage, with commercial companies.

A major consequence of all this quite familiar stuff has been to make it seem as if positive or progressive developments in broadcasting will only really be possible within the public sector, because only the public sector is permitted to be socially and culturally responsive to the extent that it is less compromised by the pursuit of profit. Some sense of what is involved here can be gained by quickly referring to an essay by Graham Murdock, where he presented cultural production as composed of two sectors; a primary, bread-winning sector 'geared to the demands of the mass market' and a secondary sector publishing works 'with only minority appeal'<sup>8</sup>, apparently for kudos, or for the purposes of, in the case of broadcasting, securing franchises. The former 'aims to turn dominant cultural themes into pleasurable products in the interests of entertainment', while the latter 'challenge dominant assumptions and subvert consumer expectations'. So, in Graham Murdock's view, if we want to locate material that can 'present a critical perspective on the social order ... probe the idealisations that justify the present order ... investigate the dynamics of social change and transformation, and explore the institutions and practices of conventional theatre'<sup>9</sup>, then we must look to his minority sector – BBC2 or Channel 4 perhaps. There are yet others who would suggest that we must look much further afield than this to the various 'really' independent attempts to *establish* progressive work. The sort of thing that Graham Murdock would have in mind they would consider incorporated and incorporating precisely because it takes place on the margins of the ideological machine which mainstream broadcasting is said to be.

Clearly these sorts of views don't really leave much room for doubt. If it is pointed out, as Garnham has done, that in many respects the output of the BBC and the IBA companies is indistinguishable and is perceived to be so by viewers, this would only serve to confirm the view that this whole area is becoming flawless, ever more efficient in the representation and reproduction of ideologies. It might be more telling to note that there are certain aspects of British broadcasting which at least some on

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<sup>8</sup> Graham Murdock, 'Authorship and Organisation', *Screen Education* no 35, Summer 1980, p 23.

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<sup>9</sup> Graham Murdock, 'Radical Drama, Radical Theatre', *Media, Culture and Society* no 2, April 1980, pp 151-168.

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<sup>10</sup> Independent Film-makers' Association discussion paper, 'Independent Film Making in the 70s' quoted in Don Macpherson (ed.), *British Cinema Traditions of Independence*, British Film Institute, London 1980, p 2.

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the left would regard as worth retaining and developing, that were established and have flourished mainly within the private sector. The 'school' of critical documentary film-making, for instance, has, since the early 1960s, found the commercial sector a little less discouraging and inhibiting and a little less constrained by the dictates of 'upward referral' that rule in the BBC. We would not have to wait long, however, for the ideological impurities of such film-making to be asserted. While it might be conceded that commercial companies have taken the initiative or made the running in *some* risky areas, they have shrunk away from others and, anyway, the films that have been made were, at best, only 'reformist', not really deconstructed or progressive.

As far as commercial broadcasting is concerned then the left's view is fairly firm and clear-cut. Its output is generally regarded as hard-core ideology, especially if the ratings are high. The organisation of this sector and the preferred modes of production, along with the 'artistic and political delimitation big capital invariably tends to impose'<sup>10</sup>, are rarely thought to extend the range of political projects, let alone to be experimental or innovatory. Indeed, this notion would be received as preposterous. On the public sector, the view is less sharp. Clearly from Nicholas Garnham's article it can be seen that there has been something of a shift in attitude with regard to the BBC and it is now no longer as optimistically regarded as it was during the late 1960s and early '70s. If a broader view of the public sector is taken, one, that is, which includes those apparently ideologically independent projects which remain dependent, nevertheless, on some form of direct or indirect state funding, then, at least in ideological respects, a considerable optimism is still expressed. While this is a sub-sector that has been, and will continue to be, financially pressed by the policies of the Conservatives, it remains for radical critics and practitioners virtually the only space in which it seems possible to experiment and thus from which to challenge what is seen as an ever more slickly running ideological machine.

## II

That we are, as Nicholas Garnham has stressed, currently witnessing a major expansion of the commercial sector in broadcasting certainly cannot be denied or questioned. What can, however, be the significance which has been attributed to this economic series of developments, along with the assessment of the activities of the commercial sector upon which it is based. Has the 'commercialisation of culture' and the 'industrialisation' of the production processes of, for example, broadcasting had the impact or the effects they are said to have had? Is broadcasting which is commercially motivated as ideological or as 'reactionary' as the critical discourses of the left would have it be? There are several reasons for answering these questions in the negative.

The perception of commercial broadcasting as anything but an ideologically singular monolith is difficult given the continuing influence of

the sort of perspective adopted in Nicholas Garnham's assessment. In particular it inhibits the perception, and then the development, of possibilities within things as they are. A typical feature of the discourses we have been considering is that they construct positive possibilities invariably as properties of some future state of things or of only the margins of the present set-up.

Take, for example, Nicholas Garnham's recommendation that 'a viable international culture politics must be developed'<sup>11</sup>. In giving assent, we should remind ourselves that this internationalism has been conditioned by, in no small way made possible by, the activities of those much despised international and transglobal corporations in the fields of popular entertainment. Their activities have *already* established an international dimension in cultural as in other affairs, which the left too readily dismisses as 'cultural imperialism' and which it then opposes with something it likes to think of as 'national' cultures. There is in this context something of the same loopy logic that operates in discussions about Britain's membership of the EEC. The left currently opposes membership and would have Britain withdraw, but would seek, in the future, 'all European co-operation in all important spheres'! In both contexts it would be considerably more appropriate to consider how to develop the potential of the forms of association that have already been established rather than daydream about pure forms to be established from scratch at some future time.

To do so in the context of broadcasting will require refraining from continually bemoaning the presence of 'foreign', especially American, programmes. This rests on an argument which is basically about jobs, but it has implications at the cultural level. Just as economies are still thought of as nationally specific, so too are cultures. But to claim that programmes are 'American' (and therefore ideologically nasty) can be quite misleading because the themes and the discourses which articulate them may not be nationally specific at all. (And so, if they are ideologically nasty, it is for reasons other than their 'Americanness'.) Indeed, it could well be precisely the absence, or relative absence, of such national specificity that enables companies located in one nation state to sell material in another. If this is so, then that more universal culture within which particular programmes are produced could well be something to be encouraged and developed rather than to be resisted. There are, anyway, no good reasons for regarding it as essentially more reactionary than the 'national cultures' it displaces. But, this is certainly not something that can be pursued when such a culture is perceived only as the imposition of American economic interests through celebrations of the 'American way of life'—whatever that might be.

The constraints which this perspective imposes are perhaps most acute in relation to the ways in which the activities of the commercial companies operating in the domestic market are discussed. As indicated already these activities are considered to be thoroughly unambiguous and to have clear-cut, devastating effects upon the national cultural formation. Nothing about them, apparently, suggests that they can be

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholas  
Garnham, *op cit*, p  
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<sup>12</sup> It is precisely because this social determination operates that 'creativity' comes to be stressed and posed as an alternative to 'commercialism' by those 'professionalised' broadcasters concerned. To defend it as such, however, to attempt to establish conditions under which 'creativity' might flourish would be a retrograde step—in effect, an attempt to return to less socialised forms of production.

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout the section on 'class and cultural consumption' Garnham reserves the term 'culture' for only certain kinds of practices, those usually associated with 'high culture'. Implicit in this is the assumption that *only* those cultural activities not engaged in by lower socio-economic groups are worthwhile. His discussion of cultural competence is such that we can only assume that those who are not in possession of those prized competences that enable the 'subtle' interpretation of 'painting, music, live theatre, art galleries etc' are simply

redeemed. If the aim is socially responsive and accountable broadcasting, then there would appear to be nothing about the commercial set-up which could be used as a basis for its development. Actually, this is not at all the case. On the contrary, the exploitation of broadcasting technology for commercial purposes has made a socially responsive and accountable broadcasting possible.

Since the mid-1950s the commercial companies have been the base for a series of initiatives that have dispersed the control of production, by, for instance, extending the range of publics to which broadcasters must respond. Precisely because they are commercial and must pursue profits, companies are sensitive to the market, to patterns of consumption and demand, and such sensitivity is an objective expectation of producers, whether those 'creative' people like it or not<sup>12</sup>. Such sensitivity has been the stimulus for the development of popular modes of address and for the inclusion, on television, of popular themes, issues, rituals and celebrations. Though such initiatives were particularly notable in relation to television entertainment, they were also in evidence in TV news and current affairs. I do not mean to suggest, however, that there is now a situation in which producers in the commercial sector directly reflect popular cultures, nor that they only work with and on these. They may not even recognise certain cultures as popular, and over those that they do, they retain powers of interpretation and mediation. Moreover, they do not perforce attend exclusively to such cultures; these must be combined with more powerful official cultures and indeed the interpretation and mediation of popular cultures characteristically proceeds by employing terms drawn from these official sources. So, while programmes located within the official or 'high' cultures are presented as 'serious' and 'important' and as having a monopoly on 'information', programmes located within popular cultures are presented as 'lightweight', 'frivolous', 'relaxing' or 'not really important'. Such differentiation, accomplished in the various ways in which different categories of programmes are scheduled, spoken and written about, positions the official cultures as dominant albeit that they are in certain respects minority cultures.

Nevertheless market forces *do* impel commercial broadcasters to be responsive to publics that the BBC and its supporters have regarded principally as the targets of their reforming cultural zeal. The commercial project does not always set out to change the situation but to align its products with the situation as it is, to insinuate its products within that which is most widely familiar. To put it this way is not quite right, however, for it still bears the mark of those dismissive accounts of popular culture which have decried the commercial project for 'pandering to popular taste'<sup>13</sup>, and it is surprising just how close Nicholas Garnham is to this position in his use of a modified cultural deprivation thesis. It is perhaps better to say that the commercial companies have during the last 30 years or so led the way in making connections with and expressing popular structures of feeling. The cost to the left of either ignoring this or of despising it has been its progressive marginalisation, if not now ir-

relevance, to the development of popular cultures.

In short, then, in order to pursue profits commercial companies have had to produce programmes that will be consumed by as many as possible and in turn this has led to a socialisation of production. Since the practitioners are not always of the cultures with which connections have to be made, mechanisms have had to be developed to make this possible. Hence, in the commercial sector, the much greater attention to market research and its use to identify 'exchangeable commodities'. For all its faults and limitations, this kind of 'action research' has added other voices to the decisions made about production, and has rendered it, in this sector, very often more socially responsive and accountable than in the BBC or even in the more radical regions of the public sector.

It may be not at all difficult to agree with some of this. There are many, from differing political positions, who would accept that commercial broadcasting has addressed itself to popular cultures, but who would find it very difficult indeed to see in this anything progressive or advantageous. Giles Oakley, for instance, has recently suggested that 'blanket condemnations of mass appeal television... are now much rarer than they used to be' and that a 'new critical climate' has been established which has 'led to an imbalance in the weight given to the search for what are considered "progressive" elements in any given programme or series'.<sup>14</sup> The BFI dossier, *Situation Comedy*, in which his attempt to demonstrate the 'often deeply conservative features of popular culture' is located, contains a number of other articles which (all too) tentatively explore the possibility that popular television comedy is textually more complex and ideologically more ambiguous than is usually thought to be the case. This is based upon an argument made by Terry Lovell, both in this dossier and elsewhere, which is that the constraints upon producers to create use-values associated with entertainment can limit their ability to produce at the same time a commodity which meets (what seem to be) the ideological requirements of capitalism.<sup>15</sup> Certainly these immanent pressures to produce not simply an exchangeable product but one that is this precisely because it is also useful, means that the resulting product can, and not infrequently does, exceed 'the preferences of the members of the board of AT&T and IBM and their corporate clients'<sup>16</sup>. But, the tentative way in which this argument has been proposed and developed is testimony to the fact that the position advanced by Giles Oakley remains the dominant one.

There is now a considerable body of sociological and psychological research into the nature of TV entertainment and its consumption, which, although drawing on quite different conceptual and methodological paradigms from those represented in the BFI dossier, does nonetheless confirm what they are trying to demonstrate. For many years this research has been concerned with the 'effects of mass entertainment' and has been motivated by the view that popular TV entertainment is a disturbing if not a dangerous phenomenon for a number of reasons. It has been charged with trivialising and distorting serious matters and for promoting, particularly among the young, the poor and those with minimal

incompetent. No allowance is made for different orders of competence as once again we are boxed into a simple and evaluative binary opposition.

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<sup>14</sup> Giles Oakley, 'Yes Minister', in Jim Cook (ed.), *Situation Comedy*, British Film Institute Dossier 17, London, 1982, p 66.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Lovell, 'Ideology and Coronation Street', in *Coronation Street*, British Film Institute Television Monograph, London; and again in 'The Social Relations of Cultural Production', in Simon Clark (ed.), *One Dimensional Marxism*, Allison & Busby, London, 1980, pp 232-256.

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Garnham, op cit, p 15.

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<sup>17</sup> Denis McQuail, Jay Gay Blumler and JR Brown, 'The Television Audience: a Revised Perspective', in Denis McQuail (ed.), *Sociology of Mass Communication*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p 138.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

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<sup>19</sup> Of course this is a structure which can be negotiated or even obviated with the assistance of video recorders. In the push towards a realistic assessment of such hardware we should not overlook its potential in terms of bringing about at least some revisions to the existing structure, revisions which will benefit viewers.

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony Piepe, Sunny Crouch and Miles Emerson, *Mass Media and Cultural Relationships*, Saxon House, Farnborough, 1978, p 139.

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official education, the adoption of 'unrealistic' and sometimes violent solutions to the various social and psychological problems they encounter. And, not least, it has been seen as 'escapist', as serving what is said to be 'the passive pleasure of being entertained . . . of getting away from real-life problems and escaping real-life boredom'<sup>17</sup>, a condition which is said to be exacerbated by properties of the viewing situation. Watching television occurs in what has been called 'out-of-role-time'. According to Denis McQuail and his colleagues, for instance, 'watching television is something to do when not at work, a facility bought by work. But in addition it is an activity that is typically disengaged from other social roles – of parent, spouse, member of group or association. Attending to the media, and watching television in particular, is typically a matter of free personal choice, carrying few obligations to the communicator or to fellow members of an audience or social group'.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly watching television is not quite the 'matter of personal choice' that these authors have claimed it to be. At the very least that supposed 'freedom' is qualified by the range of programmes on offer at any given moment of the 'viewing day' – itself a structure within which a viewer's choices have to be made.<sup>19</sup> Several studies, including market research, have shown that watching TV is, like any other activity, also determined by already established and relatively stable sets of social relations, and that other 'roles' interact with that of viewer. Hence, viewing is not quite the 'out-of-role' activity it has been said to be. Nevertheless, what McQuail and his colleagues have said is not utterly without merit: they have glimpsed something important about viewing in saying that it is 'typically disengaged' in the sense that it is 'free from feelings of duty and obligation', or rather, free from certain *kinds* of feelings of duty and obligation. In other words, what is expected or demanded of viewers in front of the telly is not at all the same as that which is demanded or expected at work, or in the classroom, or even at SEFT conferences on the subject of watching TV. Part of the pleasure of watching television is constituted precisely in this difference and in what may *feel* like the total absence of any obligations or prohibitions. And, it is mainly because of this relative absence of obligations in the course of watching TV that it has been considered something more than just a diverting pastime. It may seem as a consequence utterly without importance, and indeed, this notion continues to haunt the left's critical discourses. But, if the norms of good behaviour which are taken to govern other (obviously more important!) settings are set to one side in front of the screen, then it seems not just diverting but, potentially at least, dangerous. The meaningfulness of watching may be such as to undermine these norms; they may come to seem irrelevant or irksome. Their authority, assuming of course they have any, may be debunked. Research on what may be said to be working class patterns of viewing, but certainly those of manual working council tenants, has suggested that for such viewers the type of programmes preferred either 'does not involve symbols of authority, or where presented these are made to seem ridiculous, like Captain Mainwaring in *Dad's Army* or the screws in *Porridge*'<sup>20</sup>. Also relevant in this



respect is the concern that 'television elections' and televisual representations of parliamentary politics are not forces which positively encourage participation, but which, on the contrary, have contributed to a disenchantment with parliamentary rituals which even the rhetorical powers of Margaret Thatcher (or her campaign managers) cannot counter.

Such evidence and observation should not lead to the conclusion that popular cultures and television's contribution to them are then not at all conservative. At the very least, however, the expression of concern and sometimes even fear about television's capacity to turn the world upside down should certainly make us more open to the notion that it can sustain values not only different from but also in opposition to those officially sanctioned and preferred. It should certainly lead to something other than the almost inevitable prejudging of popular television that so much critical writing has engaged in. In this body of work, which extends from Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts* to many of the articles published at the present time in journals such as *Screen* and *Media, Culture and Society*, it is virtually axiomatic that popular television is ideological or in some way or another inadequate, and it only remains to demonstrate just how this is so. If we want to know something about the patterns of viewing, about the likes and dislikes, and the modes of discrimination of a certain, increasingly marginal, section of the English intelligentsia then such writing can be counted as a rich resource for research. But it most certainly cannot be taken too seriously as a contribution to an understanding of *popular* patterns of viewing. All such writing delivers are unsubstantiated presuppositions about how programmes circulate and about the effects to which they may contribute. As Jim Cook has observed, 'for all the sophisticated elaboration that is possible on such positions, what they never satisfactorily confront are justifications for their imputed effects (i.e., they never investigate what understandings particular real audiences gain from narratives) nor the nature of the alternatives proposed to the dominant models they so fear. Consequently the proposal for radical deconstructive forms never really demonstrates the ideological superiority such forms are deemed to enable.'<sup>21</sup>

In these respects, then, a major problem exists. This problem has less to do with attributing this or that effect to seemingly popular programmes, and more to do with that apparently ineluctable drive to engage in this kind of evaluative activity. At the moment things may seem more positive because publications like the BFI dossier on sitcoms register a readiness to adopt a more sympathetic view of popular television. However, even this dossier does not quite escape the evaluative approach. What even the best of this work does not do, is to suspend judgement in order to examine the means by which programmes or types of programmes are deemed watchable and, among other things, pleasurable. There is no guarantee, given that the evidence dealt with is mainly textual, that the aspects of programmes found interesting or progressive by the various writers concerned will be so found by others who move in

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<sup>21</sup> Jim Cook, 'Narrative Comedy, Character and Performance', in Jim Cook (ed.), *Situation Comedy*, op cit, p 17.

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quite different cultural spheres from them. If, as this and other works have argued, viewing is not just a matter of interpretation or a reproduction of pre-given (universal) competences, but rather *a moment of the production of meaning*, why has there been so little effort devoted to determining just how it is a moment of production? In effect, the approach adopted by the dossier reduces viewing once again to mere interpretation, and possibly worse, a mere textual effect. Again in these respects the left has lessons to learn from those cultural entrepreneurs it despises so much, not least, to learn from them how to suspend judgement. To these entrepreneurs it matters little, most of the time, whether they like or dislike the material produced, whether they consider it elevating, progressive or not. What does matter is whether or not the material will be watched; what matters, in other words, are popular tastes. So, instead of trying all the time to demonstrate just why this or that programme is 'ist' in one way or another, critical writers really interested in change ought to be more concerned to identify why certain types of programme are preferred and what *particular* and specific structures of feeling and thought are thereby sustained.

Unfortunately, this is not just a research problem, because the nature of the left's interest in popular cultures and popular television also has important strategic implications. The major implication is, as I have already suggested, that it has till now sustained a retreat from, if not, as Jim Cook suggested, a fear of, popular cultures and a willing participation in their development. The significance of Nicholas Garnham's article, in the end, is not only that it expresses views that are frequently uttered by those who can only see the economic face of broadcasting as an 'infiltration' and 'corruption' of what would have otherwise been an 'authentic' popular culture. It is also significant because in reaffirming such views, it once again sanctions a paralysis, an inability to become effectively involved. Much of what Garnham has said concerning the way in which the various new technologies will be used is right. The problem is that he cannot conceive of the dominant logics of the situation as fundamentally unstable and contradictory, and therefore open to more than one course of development. Even as this novel hardware is exploited for profits it can also sustain uses which are socially beneficial, as has already happened in the exploitation of the existing technologies. These new technologies will, inevitably, sooner or later, be introduced. It would be extremely foolish then to defend 'existing broadcasting institutions against the threat from cable and satellite'<sup>22</sup>, because once again the left in so doing would define itself out of any effective existence. Certainly there is a problem to do with the conservatism of broadcasting workers, but this will not be resolved simply by ignoring it. In the longer term, the effect of this will be to place these workers in a weaker negotiating position. The alternative? In general terms, there can only be one and that is to learn how to deal effectively with the potential of things as they are and as they will soon become. Outside of this there is only irrelevance, something with which the left has become unfortunately all too familiar.

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<sup>22</sup> Nicholas  
Garnham, *op cit*, p  
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# FEEDING THE PANIC AND BREAKING THE CYCLE

DAVID LUSTED EXAMINES  
THE PRESS COVERAGE OF  
'POPULAR TV AND SCHOOLCHILDREN'

CHILDREN AND YOUTH are consistent focuses of the many moral panics which are regular features of media stories. Contenders for leading subjects are street crime ('muggers'), disturbances at football matches ('hooligans') and sex offences against the underage ('sex-fiends'). The sex offence is the main attraction at this moment (July 21, 1983) and Peter Adamson recently took time off from his role as Len Fairclough in *Coronation Street* to star as the pervert in the trial-by-Fleet-Street which preceded his acquittal. Indeed, this particular instance combines three components of a moral panic which mostly only require two: children and deviancy. The third component is *television*.

This is why there is a long tradition of media-fed moral panics over television and its proposed effects; moral panics over television invariably feature *three*, rather than just two, components. These features can be identified in any moral panic over television. The following items exemplify a tradition as old as television itself. The first example is the earliest I have found. Both are otherwise arbitrary selections, chosen to give a chronological frame.

## CHILDREN'S TV FILM A MISTAKE

*Adventure films are to be more carefully scrutinised before inclusion in children's television. Sir Ian Jacob, Director General of the BBC, has admitted to Mr. Llewellyn, Conservative MP for Cardiff North, that the picture 'Wallaby Jim of the Islands' was a mistake.*

*An adventure story of the South Seas, it showed knife and gun fights, and the*

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<sup>1</sup> *Popular TV and Schoolchildren: the Report of a Group of Teachers*, the Department of Education and Science, April 1983.

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Whitehouse, 'Today's Children Are Deprived - of Their Childhood', the *Daily Mail*, January 27, 1981.

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*beginning and ending of the whipping of a seaman. Mr. Llewellyn said to me last night that he had not seen the film but had protested after a complaint by a constituent whose 12-year-old daughter had hysterics after seeing it...*

*Daily Telegraph*, 15.1.54

### TV LESSON

*Nice (AP)*—A five-year-old boy has shot and critically wounded a seven-year-old friend because he would not give the younger boy a piece of chewing gum. The boy told police he had learned how to load his father's rifle 'watching films on television'.

*Times*, 24.6.83

It is in the context of this tradition that an important report on television and education has found itself.

### TV and Moral Panics

The wide press response to the publication of the report on children and television sponsored by the Department of Education and Science (DES)<sup>1</sup> must have surprised its authors. What had they said to deserve the almost wholly sensational or derisory treatment by Fleet Street? Very little, really. The final conclusion of the teacher authors is a call for a forum ('arrangements at appropriate levels', p 27) in which TV producers, teachers and parents can debate 'their different but related responsibilities in understanding better the impact of television upon the young' (p 27). This article is intended to prevent that conclusion from being lost; it is also an account of how it probably will be.

For the press, certain details of the report had a familiar ring. Regardless of what the report actually said, its publication prompted reruns of moral panics and liberal angst over television. It is the focus of three distinct but popularly confused issues about television and children. The first is the common fear of television's effects on child behaviour: do children copy what they see? The second is fear of television's effects on the child mind: is TV-watching a passive activity? The third is fear of exposure to sex and violence: are children thereby, in Whitehouse's famous phrase, 'deprived of their childhood'?

Let's give each a name and call them the 'copycat', 'anaesthetic' and 'sexviolence' theses, respectively. As these constituents of moral panics over television are popularly confused, it's worth taking time to comment on them and their apparent integration.

The first two fears stem from behaviourist assumptions that all stimuli effect measurable responses and that the cause(s) of an effect can be isolated. If you watch television (often, crucially, a *lot* of television) it must do something to you, in the same way as eating makes you live, exercise makes you healthy and reading improves the mind. Unlike the subsequent examples, the attitude to television is a negative one; whatever it does to you, it is assumed, it can't be good. As physiological consequences aren't crucial on this point, it is clearly a *cultural* issue, dealing

with cultural valuations of some activities over others. The pertinent question is why *television* is given this special attention? Why not other areas of child activity – playing games, playing with toys, peer interaction, etc? The answer lies in two areas. The first is the cultural valuation of these child leisure activities; play is fine for kids but television watching is not considered so ‘natural’ and, moreover, with the exception of programmes for children, television is seen as an adult activity. Second, the history of child activities lies buried; watching television is a more recent phenomenon and hence more culturally disturbing. This is to do with living memory – there is only one generation as yet which grew up with television – and with prevailing attitudes to organised popular culture, generally. Before television, moral panics were frequent over cinema, comics, music hall, the novel...

The crucial distinction between these two fears about television’s effects on children, however, is in the *nature* of the effects they assume. The first, the copycat thesis, assumes an active effect; the second, the anaesthetic thesis, assumes a passive effect. The first draws attention to the nature of the television *image*, to what is seen. The second draws attention to the nature of television viewing itself, to the *institution* of television. In short, images stimulate but the institution paralyses. The assumptions are contradictory, of course, hence the interminable confusion of successive moral panics and the idleness of calls for resolution by conclusive research.

The only possible way to make sense of the phenomenon is to locate it in the cultural crises the moral panics themselves expose. The copycat thesis arises from long-standing middle-class fears about expressions of working class dissent – taking to the street, working for social change, ‘rising up’ – and working-class youth is the contemporary extension. The fear is that the *working class* child will be socialised into disturbing ‘anti-social’ activity by television representations congruent with such expressions of working class dissent; hence, for instance, worries – and, indirectly, the funds for research! – about the street disturbances (the ‘riots’) of the Summer of 1981.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the anaesthetic thesis arises from the middle-class fear about its *own* children adopting institutional habits that depress them from the social and individual ‘work’ activities necessary to compete and succeed in a capitalist order.

The third of the three related but distinct fears about television and children – the fear of exposure to sex and violence – stems from a puritan distaste for sexual pleasure (coition for purposes other than reproduction) and sexual display (especially female nudity) coupled, as it were, with a liberal pacifism about physical force. The combination provides, therefore, a range of politically irreconcilable emphases (from the ‘moral rearmament’ lobby mixing a fear of sexual display with support for imperialist ventures like the Falklands, to the male readership of the *Guardian* opposing regulation of pornography while deploring police ‘brutality’<sup>4</sup>).

The first and third of these fears share a particular assumption worth

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<sup>3</sup> See, especially, Howard Tumber, *Television and the Riots*, London, British Film Institute, 1982.

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<sup>4</sup> Somewhere in there lies the idiosyncrasy of *Financial Times* TV critic Chris Dunkley, who can dismiss the moralists while sharing much of their politics. See, for instance, the *Listener* correspondence and ‘Langham Diary’ between May 19 and July 14, 1983.

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural assumptions about children are almost as important. It shouldn't be forgotten that the ideological construction of 'childhood' is also a considerable factor in moral panics about television.

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noting, however – a naive view of visual representation. The representation of an action is taken for the action itself and no differentiation is made between the forms of representation. Nude bathers on Brighton beach, dancers in a light entertainment spectacle, a dramatised bedroom scene – all connote 'sex'. Auto-car destruction in *The Dukes of Hazard*, a dramatised scene of torture (except in Shakespeare plays where it signifies catharsis), news footage of Northern Ireland bomb-blasts – all connote 'violence'. Little distinction is made between fictional and non-fictional forms; the modes of address by which audiences are invited to form a point of view on the represented actions are ignored; the categories of 'sex' and 'violence' are generalised and vague. The fundamental assumption is that the medium itself is dealing not with representation – with the construction of meaning through form and ideology, 'ways of seeing' – but with the 'real'. It is the old, discredited but tenacious belief in the myth of transparency.<sup>5</sup>

Since the myth of transparency offers assurance that access to knowledge of the social world is direct and unmediated, a problem arises when attention is turned to the nature of the television institution doing the mediating. Television's transparency also means, as we all know, that television's objectivity and neutrality is (give or take a few manipulating militants like Ken Loach and John Pilger) guaranteed. Hence, a dilemma. Either, there is a conspiracy *within* television, offering anti-social images and/or sexviolence – in which case a purge of individuals is called for ('we name the guilty ones'), short of regulation at the point of production – or, there is something in the *nature* of television-watching which can only be altered by greater regulation at the point of consumption in the home. Hence, also, the inability of a moral panic to resolve the fears it arouses since, on the one hand, regulation of production offends free market assumptions and, on the other, legislation for regulation in the home is impossible.

It is necessary to deal with the components and structuring determinations of moral panics in this detail simply to try to clarify what is otherwise a wholly mystifying cultural uncertainty about television and children, to expose its cultural impulses and its deeply ideological framing. The common reflex is to assume that fears are reasonable but that more regulation is not the answer. Impasse. It is also necessary to claim for this framing an ideological *effect* (perhaps in a last-ditch effort to reclaim some currency for the term!) which effectively blocks understanding. The effect is to refuse serious debate about television's conditions of production, circulation and consumption – especially its 'popular' appeal – and to debase (or, at best, reduce) the claims for its formal study.

The press treatment of what I see in the DES report as an important contribution to unjamming the impasse and setting terms for more productive debate is therefore important. In other words, the context into which the report was released is as important as the report itself.

The publication of 'Popular TV and Schoolchildren' was delayed a number of times before its release after the weekend of June 18 and 19, 1983, the last delay caused by the General Election and the remote possibility of a change of Education Minister. The extent of the coverage (four front pages and four editorials in the national dailies alone) was probably determined in part by lack of alternative news leads. Also, the Press Association release drew the eye of the dailies by leading with the report's reference to *The Kenny Everett TV Show*. Everett had been a hot celebrity since his infamous 'Bomb the Russians' joke (?) at the Tory pre-election rally on June 5. However, the space given over to the report can also be seen as part of a rising crescendo of moral panics on closely related themes, detailed here chronologically and with a flavour of their coverage:

a) the fear of increasing access to pornography from cable and video-recorders, e.g.

*Sir, -I note with dismay in the Hunt Committee's report on cable television that, while religious organisations might be banned from ownership of cable TV channels, the porn merchants, peddling their degrading material, are to be given special treatment by providing subscribers with a special 'naughty-lock' to prevent children tuning in to X-rated films...*

—from a letter in the *Scotsman*, 16.10.82

and

#### **PUPILS SHOWING SEX VIDEOS FOR PRICE OF LUNCH**

—headline in the *Daily Telegraph*, 2.6.83

b) the financial and critical success of *Gandhi* tempered by a pocket of press debate over its 'historical' accuracy, e.g.: 'Gandhi isn't good for you: Paul Johnson demolishes the film as an historical account...', the *Daily Telegraph* 16.4.83; and letter headlines 'Greater Evils than the British Raj', 'Myth of British Brutality', the *Daily Telegraph*, 13.4.83.

c) fears about effects on children of 'video nasties', e.g.: 'War declared on video nasties', the *Times* 14.4.83, and 'A Video Nasty Killer', the *Daily Mail*, 13.7.83, interspersed by debate in Parliament (*Hansard*, 30.6.83, p 698) in which the Prime Minister vows to introduce controlling legislation.

d) four contentious TV plays on education by David Leland, e.g. 'his conclusions are disturbing', the *Daily Mail*, 19.6.83; 'Fury at Skinhead Telly Shocker', the *Sun* 12.7.83.

e) the Commons free vote on the return of hanging for capital crimes. In a debate in which morality of the case was more important than its merits as a deterrent, David Owen claimed the negative vote a success but drew from it a call for more attention to the causes of violence, citing

television as a prime candidate (BBC Radio's *Today* programme, 14.7.83).

f) a series of reports and lobbies eliciting press coverage interacting with the above list;

1. In an article by Suzie Rodwell (*Times Education Supplement*, 2.4.82), headlined 'Scapegoat for Society's Ills', a tour through the various forms of research 'into violence, children and television' isolates two publications key to the renewed press interest in the subject. The publications are *Sex, Violence and the Media* by H J Eysenck and David Nias, (Morris Temple Smith 1978), a review of behavioural research to date and 'new' evidence of media influences on behaviour and attitude, and *TV Violence and the Adolescent Boy*, William Belson (Saxon House 1978), which Rodwell says finds 'high exposure to television increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence'.
2. The formation of a new moral lobby in the UK, following on from a similar US organisation called the National Coalition for TV Violence. Called the TV Action Group, it is greeted with selected press coverage (e.g. Anne Karpf, the *Guardian*, 13.3.79 and Roger Housden, 'The Television Disease', the *Daily Telegraph* 21.5.79) and is joined, notably, with the position of Mary Whitehouse in a review of proposals on sexnviolence to the Council of Europe ('Agenda', the *Guardian*, 6.9.82).
3. A series of reports whose full sources I've been unable to trace beginning with a US study by J and D Singer which finds that television addiction reduces the educational potential and recommends teaching 'about the nature of the TV medium' (Jeremy Campbell, the *New Standard*, 24.6.81). Under the headline 'Parents Warned on TV News Horrors', the *Daily Mail* (Christopher Rowlands, Education correspondent, 7.5.83) looks at a teachers' booklet called 'Language and the Primary School' which calls for control of access to videos, regulation of TV watching in the home and especially of newsreels and news 'confrontation interviews'. Finally, the release of the DES report motivated Cedric Cullingford, Dean of Oxford Poly, to offer previews of his own research in an 'exclusive' by Auriol Stevens, Education Correspondent, in the *Observer*, 26.6.83, and characterised by Peter Fiddick in the *Listener* (30.6.83) as finding that children watch more adult television than adults think, producing 'mindless inattentiveness'.

What's at stake in this chronology is the extent to which the press tendency to expose moral panics over television fuels and is fuelled by research, reports and lobbies; how education correspondents are clearly sensitised to the issue, dipping into and, again, rekindling the more sensational exposures; the ease with which any public issue—like the hanging debate—or a cultural case—like the historical 'accuracy' of *Gandhi*—can turn on or be turned to a moral attack on television.

Any intervention into a debate on television and children, therefore, had to contend with this context and clearly risked framing by those terms. It is negotiating the press context that constitutes the problem.



The question of the role of the press in how it constructed the DES report is therefore crucial.

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### The Press Response

For the vast majority of the press, the DES report is simply one more expression of alarm at the level of sexnviolence on television. Along with the *Sun* and the *Guardian*, the *Standard* (21.6.83), the *Daily Express* (22.6.83) and the *Daily Mail* (22.6.83) all represent the report as 'what teachers dislike about television'. In the tabloids, there is predictably more headline and picture than copy, itself full of misquotation. There is no concern, here, for what it is that is presumed to be disliked. Indeed, this type of coverage merely assumes a consensus of benign worry about something indeterminate but simply *shared*.

Elsewhere in the press the emphasis on sexnviolence still dominates but there is a very interesting series of denials of the Report's *assumed* distaste for popular television. Editorials in both the *Times Education Supplement* and the *Daily Telegraph* (26.6.83) implicitly assume that the report is worried about the effects (on behaviour or attitude; there is an uncertain slippage) of popular television on a young audience. They also assume that the consequence of such a position is to require greater regulation, censorship and standardisation of television output. The *TES* accuses the report's authors of 'plodding over-literality', 'crying for the moon' and being 'po-faced', while the *Daily Telegraph* manages to criticise the teachers for both 'moral priggishness and authoritarianism' *and* being 'trendy and forward-looking' (in the *Daily Telegraph*, you'll understand, these are terms of abuse). For the *TES*, the 'casual linking of violence with sex' and 'risque laughs' 'at the expense of homosexuals' is part of 'the English music hall tradition'. (You can almost hear the 'authorised subtext': 'where's their sense of humour?').

What lies behind this apparent rush to celebrate hedonism is, of course, a defence of television as a market place. As an editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* puts it: 'the merit of television . . . is its diversity.' And, of course, the proper regulation of television lies not in its *production* but at the point of *consumption* and, especially and predictably, with *parents*, who are the only proper arbiters of who watches what: the family and privatised viewing are the normative control mechanism.

The moral panic reaches as far as the most sophisticated press responses to the report. The *Observer* editorial (26.6.83) stands alone in *naming* the framing debate and using George Gerbner's research to object to the report's assumed support for the 'claim to show a causal link between violent crime and television shows'. Instead, the editorial offers Gerbner's view that heavy television consumption provides 'a distorted and restricted view of the world and . . . a highly exaggerated notion of the amount of violence in society' and calls for more 'effort to be spent on teaching children to watch television with discrimination'. Not much of an advance, it's true, but it's a corrective to the 'television

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<sup>6</sup> A letter of complaint over such ritual treatment was printed – with cuts blurring the issue. (*Times Educational Supplement*, January 7, 1983).

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as market place' conservatism of the *Daily Telegraph* and at least it acknowledges research rather than simply 'what everybody knows'.

Most importantly, the *Observer* endorses the report's call for more education about the media. Unfortunately, the editorial calls explicitly for a discriminatory approach. Only the *Times* editorial (23.6.83) calls, incredibly, for the 'cultural criticism' necessary to prevent media studies becoming an extension of moral valuation and ensure the proper conditions for theory and critical studies of the media. Indeed, the *Times* editorial is the only example of a press statement evidencing close reading of the report and awareness of an alternative tradition of media research and education to the dominant effects-research and its related moral panics. Describing the report as 'not a survey... nor an account. It is a commentary,' it notes the discrepancy between its tentativeness and the strident reactions of the press.

### The Educational Press

The mainstream educational press is a real problem. The one arena in which journalism on media education should be expected routinely neglects its responsibilities. Products of film or television cultural scholarship are regularly ignored and irregularly reviewed. When reviewed, the chosen reviewer is a film or television personality rather than a comparable scholar. The most recent and appalling instance of this was when the *TES* chose Iain Johnstone, the BBC's *Film 83* presenter, to review John Ellis' major book of scholarship, *Visible Fictions* (19.11.82).<sup>6</sup>

A similar process is revealed over the treatment of the DES report. The *Guardian* was the most depressing, printing 500 words by an Education Correspondent in its main section under the headline 'Teachers Fire Broadside at Everett's "Cheap Smut"' (22.6.83) with copy indistinguishable from the sensation-seeking raid on the report by the tabloid press. (The difference between this approach and the *Sun*'s headline 'Ken's TV Naughty Bits Bashed by Teachers' (22.6.83), for instance, is merely one of familiarity of address. So much for responsible journalism.) A telephone call to the *Guardian*'s Education Section asking for specialist coverage was met with rebuff: 'We've already covered it.'

The *TES* at least offered more copy: a straightforward dissection over half a page (Caroline O'Grady, Editor of Media Section, 24.6.83), a risible editorial (24.6.83), a page from critic Chris Dunkley (1.7.83) and subsequent correspondence (so far, three short letters, 8.7.83 and 15.7.83). But, again, apart from in-house journalists, copy was solicited only from a mainstream television critic.

Now, what's wrong with this? It is democratic, isn't it, for the non-academic to find platforms to express a lay point of view? The problem is that while, say, works of literary criticism or political science are informed by a range of reviewing credentials, these are established disciplines and the regular process of review reinforces the legitimation. There is no such deference to or comparable recognition of works of media

scholarship in the educational press.

Imagine the probability of—and the predictable response from the academic establishment—the educational press offering Barbara Cartland exclusive reviews of the latest piece of lit crit, or making David Yip, the actor who plays TV's *Chinese Detective*, the sole reviewer of every item of scholarship on China's political scene? A caricature? Of course, but it serves to demonstrate the position media scholarship finds itself in.

The systematic exclusion of film and television educationists and cultural criticism from the exposure afforded by the mainstream educational press produces a cycle of effects. It means that that press and its readership have virtually no sense of a tradition of research and education about film and television, no sense of debate within it, no sense of its theory and pedagogy. It means that media scholarship has no space to assert its own terms beyond its own audience, and to develop them in more public understandings of media issues. The result is that at odd moments when the press is inspired to slice into the field, it responds uncomprehendingly; hence the fear of jargon, the fine irony of accusations of bias, the sense that specialism is superfluous, that there is nothing to consider beyond common sense. So the educational press and media scholarship form two separate systems. While sublime ignorance reigns in the educational press, the general treatment of film and television, indeed all media issues, remains locked in the conventional stranglehold that effects research and moral panics combine to exercise over public debate. Media scholarship, marginalised, can have little input into it.

### The Broadcasters

The press solicit views from the broadcast companies at the same time as covering the report. The report calls for contribution to debate from *producers* as representatives of the broadcast companies, isolating them from their institutional contexts and ignoring other figures therein. The press seek quotes from television administrators exclusively. (It's not clear which side is being naive here: the teachers for assuming that producers determine TV output, or the press for assuming that the report *means* television administrators.) Thames TV and IBA spokespeople defend individual programmes, especially *Minder*, from supposed criticism. The BBC's director general, Alistair Milne, is quoted as saying 'a better understanding of the situations portrayed' was available from the report's quotes from children who 'gave more illuminating views than those of their elders' (the *Scotsman*, 22.6.83). Beyond this, the administrators are implicitly dismissive.

The trade weekly *Broadcast* covers the report by giving most space to children's programme Heads who feel snubbed that the report disregards their own output and dismiss its supposed findings in that light. As the BBC's Edward Barnes is quoted, 'if they were making a survey of influences, why did they leave out children's television?' Granada's

Stephen Leahy is quoted, 'we are facing up to (our responsibility) well' and predictably shifts the buck to parents.

In the BBC's *Listener*, Peter Fiddick is rightly sceptical of the whole sad history, noting how each successive report/moral panic seems unrelated: 'next time around, a new set of activists put their heads to it, as it were, from scratch'. He is cautious about making judgements on the basis of limited studies like Cullingford's. Fiddick also notes equivocations in the report, a 'diffidence in offering clear judgement', and puts it down to the reflection of 'diverse opinions within a carefully diverse group, though as such equivocations multiply, and on some apparently uncontentious topics, it is hard not to sense the hand of Sir Humphrey somewhere in the drafting.' Aside from these useful comments and without the emotive language of the *TES* and the *Daily Telegraph* editorials, Fiddick also seems to subscribe to the sense those newspapers share that TV is basically unchangeable in a wider culture in which, he concludes, 'most, after all, still seem to survive'.

Fiddick's otherwise reasoned and reasonable treatment of the report and its press coverage nonetheless stands for the general broadcast response. If the television institution is to share in a debate informed by 'cultural criticism', it is clear that none of its representatives will volunteer for the task.

### The DES Report

Sections of the (mainly but not exclusively) tabloid press search for more of the same to feed the sensation-seeker. The 'quality' press essentially 'worry' but can't see a way out. The educational and broadcast press are more tired of the whole business and so are content that television be left to get on with its job.

How can any single report negotiate this minefield of hysteria and boredom? 'Popular TV and Schoolchildren' has a good stab at it. For a report produced by a group of non-media educationists, non-specialists, there is much to admire and support – albeit with considerable critical reservations – in its attempt to further debate on its subject. The report's major failure is its inability to signal the arguments that lie behind many of its findings and conclusions – arguments drawn from a wide range of media scholarship<sup>7</sup> – and the sense of conflicting assumptions buried in various of its formulations. Fiddick is right, for instance, that there is at times a sense of conflicting minority opinions in struggle for ascendancy; some parts of the report simply don't accord with assumptions met elsewhere in its pages. The authors were chosen, randomly it appears, to represent various subject disciplines, sectors of education and ethnic and gender opinion. What most marks the report is a sense of the product of an assembly, using even the statements from children to contrast with statements of the teachers.

The report's programme sample is surprisingly eclectic, not just the popular television forms like drama and light entertainment as indicated

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<sup>7</sup> The *Times Educational Supplement* editorial, June 24, 1983, p 2, found the 'lamentably exiguous bibliography ... with its predictable (sic) BFI left-wing colouration' reason enough to dismiss it.

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in its title, but also news, current affairs and features like Roger Graef's *Police* series and the science series, *Tomorrow's World*. Popular television is most often considered as a synonym for culturally-despised types of fiction, like soap-opera, and types of light entertainment, like quizzes: to assert that 'the popular' includes news and current affairs is to offer a considerable shift of opinion. Sadly, this point was largely ignored by the press.

The report is explicitly concerned with the issue of television *representation*, 'the images of adult life and society' (p 1): who gets to be represented on the screen and how they're seen. Predictably, it kicks off with representations of sexnviolence. Although it includes some formulations arising from, and is finally trapped by, the moralisms of this frame ('we are very concerned about the cumulative effect . . . of the frequent presentations of violence', p 10), it is also careful to distinguish between types of violence and the linking of sex to power. Despite the press assumption that the report was critical of *Minder*, for instance, its coverage is typical of the ambivalence in all its formulations which are most often structured as if 'yes, there is/is not more/less violence but . . .' and the qualifications are crucial. Most importantly, nowhere does the report 'claim to show a causal link between violent crime and television shows' (*Observer* editorial 26.683). While some fears are voiced, there is an overriding sense of their inadequacy compared to the certainty that 'different people perceive the same programme in quite different ways, and then put that experience to quite different use' (p 2).

What the DES report is searching for, and is clearly not aware of, is a language with which to discuss the formal differences and social determinations of television. In the short section on sexual representations, for instance, its worry that in *We'll Meet Again* there is 'insufficient time to explore any one relationship in sufficient detail to provide convincing characterisation' (p 11) reveals a model of psychological realism for narrative fiction. Similarly, in the next section of 'Heroes and Personalities', the concern about 'the unpleasant image presented by JR (in *Dallas*) . . . and the apparent inability of the other characters in the story to cope with his evil ways' could be assuaged had the authors been more familiar with the conventions of American melodrama and the complex relation between fictional characters and audience identification. These realist worries also crop up in speculations on the effects of mixing forms, familiar to debate about drama-documentary, as in the judgement on *Minder*: 'romantic fantasy dressed up . . . as reality' (p 12).

If the sections which deal with fictional forms are marred by evaluative tendencies searching for a language to describe the recognised heterogeneity of television's forms and modes of address – a language that cultural criticism could provide – this is not the case when the report deals with non-fiction, especially news. In sections on representations of 'Authority' and 'The Police', the report shows itself aware of critical debate in a number of instances. Discerning a consistent pattern of treatment, it nonetheless concedes 'a varied and confusing set of messages' (p 14) and demonstrates consciousness of how, regardless of meaning pro-

duced, audiences are active producers themselves; 'it is not clear how young people perceived the programmes and the subsequent controversy' (over the *Police* series) (p 15). Indeed, an indication of how far critical debates about the *construction* of news have entered non-specialist consciousness is demonstrated by two prime quotes:

*What is important is that young people are able to see and understand how television **selects and allots priorities** to the news it decides to broadcast; what are the contrasting elements of style that differentiate 'World in Action' from 'Panorama'... (p 16) (my emphases).*

*The basic issue remains of how television can give adequate coverage to important subjects, granted its constant need to review priorities in its selection of newsworthy items to be broadcast. (p 17)*

These formulations are negotiations of debate in cultural criticism, symptomatic of the report's sense that news is a kind of fiction, conforming to televisual modes of presentation. What is absent, of course, is a sense of the relation between these formal matters and the means of production of news beyond the television institution. Despite this absence, the report's comments on the non-fictional arena are an advance, perhaps demonstrating the impact of critical debate on non-fictional rather than fictional forms on the wider culture. Certainly, the evaluative tone that is asserted throughout the concerns with TV fiction are most clearly abandoned in these sections in favour of a search for understanding.

Up to this point in the report, comments on representations of institutions like the police, authority and the family are crossed by conservative alarms that television may undermine faith in them. When the report subsequently examines representations of *social groups*, however, it offers more radical comment. Here, the emphasis is on the underrepresentation of these social categories and, without going so far as to use the term, the oppressive (for which, read 'restricted') nature of the dominant representations. It points out, for instance, the hypocrisy of 'overt protests in some programmes about the sexual exploitation of women, yet on the other some of the programmes' appeal is based on exactly that exploitation' (p 20). It also avers that 'the main image of children and teenagers... is one of trouble and conflict' (p 21); that 'the treatment of foreigners is crude and unsympathetic, all too often sowing the seeds of stereotypes or confirming them' (p 23); that there is a 'bias towards the South and particularly London' (p 24).

The comments demonstrate the extent to which elements of critical cultural work have gained a purchase on the report's debate about the media; feminist theory has clearly informed the section on women and the characterisation of the image of youth arises directly from work on youth subcultures. Obviously, the report picks up on only a part of these cultural debates on representation, failing to develop those aspects which provide a more sophisticated account of the work of social determination and audience-positioning that notions of representation afford.

But if it evidences a tenuous incursion into cultural criticism, it is nonetheless an exciting and significant advance that the report qualifies itself (even at its moments of emphatic judgement) by its call for more debate and more formal education.

One set of tendencies in the report could have led it to follow the conventional logic of moral panics about television and conclude with calls for greater regulation and more censorship. To the group's credit this popular option is firmly resisted. The report calls for an *organised* forum of debate and asks those working in television production to join on terms which accept the importance of understanding 'how programmes . . . make available . . . images of the world and . . . disseminate information and opinions as well as relaying particular attitudes and values . . . the products of television may be the main source of significant influence on the way in which . . . images of certain groups develop' (p 25). It also calls upon more schools to provide specialist courses in media studies and argues, encouragingly, that 'all teachers should be involved in examining and discussing television programmes with young people' (p 27). The purpose and method of that education is unstated, leaving a vacuum to be filled by media educationists if they can seize this rare opportunity.

It is important not to argue that the report offers unqualified support for 'cultural criticism' to enter public debate and the classroom. There are ample absences, confusions and symptoms of moral panics traversing it to deny that. Asking why audiences watch television, for instance, unlocks theories of *pleasure*, a concept wholly absent from the report but fundamentally underwriting the cultural role of television. 'Popular TV and Schoolchildren' is not, however, yet another alarmist contributor to the long march of useless moral panics, as its press coverage overwhelmingly represents it. It is important to build on the positive possibilities its publication affords to develop cultural debate and media studies. Meanwhile, the press will continue to define agendas for debate and to limit possible definitions so long as it sustains the cycle of primitive moral panics and its mad and unbreakable circle of reasoning.

The question has to be – how to break the cycle? Will cultural critics, media scholars and educationists take up the challenge?

## CORRECTION

The series of stills on page 31 of the July-October 1983 issue (volume 24 number 4-5) were incorrectly identified. They are not from *Pandora's Box* but from *Prix de Beauté*, in which Louise Brooks also starred one year later, in 1930.

# 'NATIONAL FICTIONS'

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY REPORTS  
FROM THE BFI SUMMER SCHOOL

The British Film Institute Summer School has, in many ways, the status of a special event but it is better seen as part of work which both precedes it and emerges from it. Looked at in this way, the tentative and speculative nature of some recent schools can be recognised as a valuable feature and the temptation to seek a clear conclusion at the end of a week's work can be more readily resisted. This year's school, in particular, clearly developed from the increasing interest in mainstream British cinema which has been marked, for instance, in the work of Charles Barr, John Ellis and John Hill, Bob Murphy's pioneering evening classes in London, recent NFT seasons on British studios and events at regional centres such as Norwich. The school was also the first to look at both film and television material, a project fraught with difficulties but one which deserves to be repeated.

The school, 'National Fictions: Struggles over the meaning of WWII'<sup>1</sup> was designed to explore the representation of the war at certain key moments – the war and post-war period, the

1950s and the 1982 Falklands period. It examined the question of the construction of a national identity, particularly in terms of class and gender, and the way in which the shifting representations of the 'People's War', across time, within different genres (comedy and the war film) and media, can be understood as contributing to a struggle over its meaning. While never pretending to take on debates about history, the school was inevitably concerned with the ways in which the past is represented in the present and issues around nostalgia and private/popular memory. It is important also to note that feminism was expected to act as an important source of strategies with which to approach this somewhat daunting task.

There were obvious difficulties in dealing with such a subject in a week and the pressures inevitably showed in the number of films and television programmes which were screened. In looking at how the war was reworked in the comedy and war film genres, the organisers were forced to fall back on admittedly lengthy extracts and in dealing with the '50s only one feature film, *The Cruel Sea*, was shown in full. The emphasis on feminism was clear in the choice of material – the use of *Millions Like Us*, *The Gentle*

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<sup>1</sup> held at Stirling University, July 30-August 6, 1983.



*Sex* and *Frieda* for the war and post-war period and the showing of *The Imitation Game* and *Tenko* among the contemporary television material. Given the pressures of the school it was probably not surprising that industrial considerations in terms, for instance, of different British studios got rather lost and the door was opened for some rather wild comparisons. (I speak as an offender in this respect!) On the other hand, the effort to assess similarities and differences was central to the school and the juxtaposition of material was always stimulating. The shift away from representations of the war itself to more recent representations of the military (in *Squadron*, *Harry's Game* and the Falklands material) did have a jarring effect but again the juxtaposition was productive. In any event, the limited material with which the school had to work makes modesty about the tentativeness of its conclusions more than usually accurate.

The school, like many other educational events centred on film and/or television, attracted a wide range of students with very different knowledge of the theoretical concepts employed and the material shown. In addition, some had considerable knowledge of the history of the period and nearly everyone had some kind of personal/political involvement with the issues under discussion. For the first time at this event, the teaching was done entirely through seminars and there were no lectures or presentations and no movement between groups. The groups themselves, with approximately 18 people each, were probably too large but for a number of discussions they split into smaller units and several of the groups split on gender lines to explore particular issues. There were a number of complaints about the lack of evidently directed teaching and the apparent liberalism of this seminar approach, but it did suggest that the BFI Education Department is taking seriously the pedagogic problems posed by such a wide range of students. The effect of this concentration on seminar work meant that it was possible for groups to construct their own arguments across a number of seminars, to return to and refine particular issues and to build on the knowledge of various members of the group. I am concerned to stress this because, while there was a general feeling that the groups had 'gone well', this was sometimes said as if it were an act of God or the

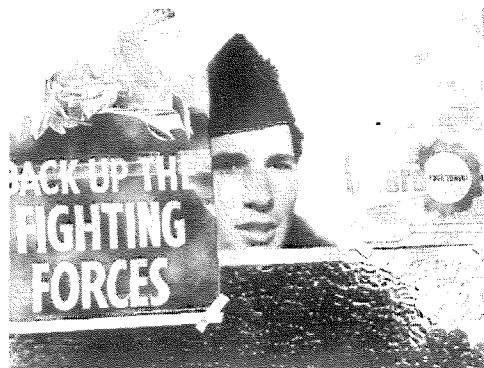
weather, without a recognition of the planning and teaching strategies involved. I would stress also the constructive nature of the work done in the seminars as opposed to the model where a position is asserted, either orally or in a paper, and then attacked to see if it (or the person proposing it) can stand up under pressure. If this constructive model is to be used in future schools, as I hope it will be, it would be worth drawing more specific attention to the collaborative nature of the exercise and offering a brief space during the week for the group to appraise its own work.

It is worth noting also the genuine attempt in the papers written for the school to be clear and accessible. This may occasionally have led to an assumption that terms, particularly those around the concept of hegemony which underpinned the school, had been understood rather better than they had been – but I would want to argue that it is only by being encouraged to use concepts that students engage in the process of understanding them.

Because of the seminar structure, it isn't possible to describe the work done in all the groups. My impression was that despite the potentially fragmented structure the groups did cover the same ground although they may well have produced different emphases and conclusions.

On reflection, the work of the group I was in can be broken down into four main areas, which are of course intimately connected:

a) the way in which notions of the individual/the group/the people/the nation continually shifted in the period under discussion and how class and gender positions were negotiated through these categories. We compared the way in which Celia's return to the group and the home front is celebrated at the end of *Millions Like Us* (1943) to the assertion at the end of *Yanks* (1979) of the importance of the individuals who stand out of the crowd. We noted the structure of many of the narratives (*The Bells Go Down*, 1943, *The Cruel Sea*, 1952, *Dad's Army*, 1971, *Squadron*, 1982, to list a few) in which individuals are brought together into groups and the different ways in which they are then inserted into concepts of the people and the nation. We considered the way women were placed in relation to these categories and particularly at the points at which their identity



World War II and the group (in *Millions Like Us*, 1943), the individual (in *Yanks*, 1979).

is centred, at least partly, on belonging to a female group (*Millions Like Us*, 1943, *The Gentle Sex*, 1943, *Tenko*, 1981). By examining modes of address and looking at documentaries as well as fictions, we began to explore the ways in which the audience is placed in relation to these concepts and how attempts to construct a national identity use different elements at different times.

b) the importance of the family, both in providing a framework for many of the stories and in offering a possible model for ways of thinking about the group or the nation. The families presented in the '40s films were often both extended and incomplete (*Frieda*, 1947, *Millions Like Us*, 1943, *The Bells go Down*, 1943) and we discussed the way in which the need for women to take up roles outside the home, potentially at least, threatened the family itself. We looked at the way in which the role of the mother is often a key one, as a source of female knowledge (*The Gentle Sex*, 1943), as a representative of a more stable past and possible future (*Frieda*, 1947) and of a morality whose relevance in the unstable present can be questioned (*This Happy Breed*, 1944, *Family at War*, 1972, *Yanks* 1979).

c) masculinity. This seems to have become the central issue of the school. In our group, it began to emerge most clearly in our discussions of the '50s war films (*The Cruel Sea*, 1952, *The Colditz Story*, 1954, *The Dam Busters*, 1954 and *Dunkirk*, 1958) and the comedies (*Private's Progress*, 1956, *Dad's Army*, 1971 and *Adolf Hitler – My Part in His Downfall*, 1972). The absence of women in these films focused our attention on the way in which masculinity was

being constructed across a set of oppositions – boy/man, incompetence/competence, impotence/strength, survival/death – which we were then able to bring to bear on other material shown at the school. We looked also at the different ways in which the male groups were represented, the way in which women were placed in relation to such groups and the troubled acknowledgement or rejection of homosexuality.

d) the disappearance of the concept of 'the people'. We became aware of the way in which the idea of the nation became increasingly abstract and removed from notions of the people so that, in the Falklands material, the audience is no longer addressed as participants but assumed to be admiring observers of the professional army. The homecomings, in fact, seem to gain their particular intensity partly because they are the only point at which those outside the army and the government can find/are given a role (*Battle for the Falklands*, 1982, *The Falklands Experience*, 1983). While the right has effectively co-opted some representations of World War II, it may be that other elements are still too intractably populist to be easily used in dealing with the Falklands or indeed with contemporary struggles in Ireland.

There was a feeling in my seminar group that we had rather neglected work in more overtly political areas, such as the representation of the left and of fascism in the war and post-war films. This was partly because the films themselves did not take up these issues to any great extent but also, I think, because we found the concept of 'popular memory' a difficult one whose usefulness in this kind of area seemed hard to establish.

# 'SELLING PICTURES'

## TANA WOLLEN SURVEYS A NEW IMAGE PROJECT FOR THE CLASSROOM

The BFI teaching pack *Selling Pictures*<sup>1</sup> is out at last. Every media studies teacher should have one. About representation and stereotyping, the pack is the first of its kind for use in schools and colleges to make explicit the crucial connections between ownership and control of production and circulation and those images which we see everywhere around us. It would be easy to criticise the producers of the pack for having oversimplified those connections but far from attempting to present a definition of the ways in which the economic determines the ideological, the pack provides various models for understanding how this determination is effected. It also avoids the temptation to evaluate this determination as simply 'right' or 'wrong' but instead gives evidence for an argument which holds that differences (in this case of class and gender) are the results of power structures which have their roots in history rather than nature.

*Selling Pictures* consists of a poster, a set of slides, class sets of two photosheets and two A4 booklets, 'Selling Pictures' and 'The Companies You Keep'. The poster displays a selection of women's magazine covers. These same magazine covers are also reproduced in the set of coloured slides which also includes images of men's 'hobby' magazine covers; advertisements; juxtaposed stereotypes of the working class, Scots and Latin Americans; and instances where such stereotyping is apparently challenged.

'Selling Pictures' is a resource booklet for teachers. It structures possible outlines for courses on representation and stereotyping, provides a rationale for the slides, poster and photosheet material and poses questions which could (should) be raised in the classroom. The booklet proposes three distinct but inter-related groups of exercises.

The first, entitled 'Image and Audience', examines the ways in which images address and specify their audiences. In this section students are required to engage in close analytical work on the magazine covers on the poster and slides. The deconstruction of images which students might have already undertaken with the first FBI Image Project, *Reading Pictures*, will usefully inform the work to be done here.

The second group, 'Image Producers', examines the ways in which ownership and control of production and circulation of the kinds of images studied in 'Image and Audience' ensures their almost exclusive dominance. Perhaps because of the density of its information, the classroom exercises suggested in this second section are more open-ended than those in the first. The exercises here relate closely to the second booklet in the pack, 'The Companies You Keep'. This can be used by teachers as a resource or by students as a text book. (Extra sets of ten can be ordered separately from the BFI.)

'The Companies You Keep' is 'an introduction to the leisure, entertainment and advertising industries and the pictures they produce'. The development of conglomerates is explained and then clarified by a cartoon case study of the 'Thorn-EMI story'. Advertising is then

<sup>1</sup> *Selling Pictures*, available for £6 (plus £1, post and packing) from BFI Publications, 81 Dean Street, London W1

98 articulated within these accounts and histories not simply as a set of practices which hoodwink everybody into parting with their hard-earned cash by using stereotypes as irresistible lures, but also as an essential part of an economic system which depends on the maximisation of profit. An explanation of the roles that advertising agencies play within this system and case studies of advertising campaigns show how images are constructed not only to position the products advertised but also to position us the audience so that in buying the product we keep both advertising agencies and their conglomerates in business and the stereotypes in circulation.

Here one criticism should be made. The poster displays sixteen different women's magazine covers, of which *Spare Rib* is one. The captions underneath the poster read as follows (deliberately constructing a paradox): 'These magazines all look alike. They're all for women and girls. Most publishers believe that women and girls are only interested in things like cosmetics, fashion, famous people, home life and romance, so they feature these things on their covers. These magazines all look different. To sell more magazines, publishers divide up the women-and-girls market as much as they can. Age, class, race and special interests are all ways of doing this. Magazine covers have to show you at once who they're supposed to be for.'

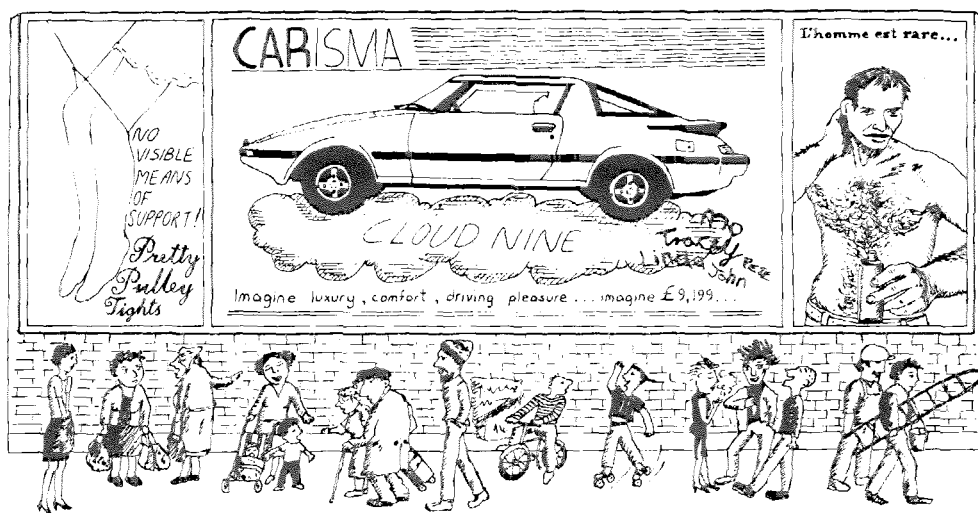
However, the *Spare Rib* cover is very different from that of the magazines which surround it. Bernadette Devlin McAliskey's look and smile have a completely different appeal from those the woman braves on the front of *My Weekly* beside her. Further, The Spare Rib Collective is organised on very different lines from IPC or D C Thomson and the differences between dominant companies and independent organisations based on co-operation ought to be examined more thoroughly in 'The Companies You Keep'. It's not enough to know that conglomerates more often than not successfully operate within the capitalist dynamic. Students should also be taught about why the producers of oppositional images have to struggle to get them circulated. This would perhaps digress from selling pictures to selling publications (why *The Leveller* is now defunct and the Publications Distribution Co-operative is in difficulty are also important teaching points). Our teaching should be more sharply focused on those who contest as

well as those who succeed.

The third group of exercises, 'Images and Stereotyping' develops contentions made in 'The Companies You Keep' – namely that stereotypical images of men and women represent what appear to be definitive ways of seeing gender difference. Those definitions, constantly repeated and redefined in the stereotyping process, are imposed on us by the companies we keep: their structures of ownership and control ensure that particular social groups are frequently unable to produce or circulate images which re-present their own definitions of themselves. Here classroom exercises depend both on slides provided in the pack and on images which students and teachers are required to collect themselves.

The section finishes by examining the likely contexts in which two black and white photographs (reproduced as a photosheet) would be found. These photographs are unusual by comparison with the others included in the *Selling Pictures* pack. They call upon students' knowledge of the dominant modes of representation and systems of circulation investigated in 'Image and Audience' and 'Image Producers' and in doing so require students to question those 'norms' and imagine possible alternatives.

These three groups of exercises which structure *Selling Pictures* can be followed and used in any number of ways. Unlike its predecessor *Reading Pictures*, this pack does not require teachers to follow a linear, step by step course. Instead, the three sections can be taught in any order since the arguments developed by each group of exercises are distinctly coherent. *Selling Pictures* does not attempt to present a straightforward linear argument whereby a chain reaction of economic causes and ideological effects arrive at conclusions somewhere out in teleological space. Although the three sections are distinct, their conceptual and detailed complexities invite the welding of logical connections. If *Selling Pictures* is of any pedagogical worth it is because of this, for welding these connections is an unwieldy business: the structures of capitalism are dynamic; the conglomerates are Protean; the dominant representations used to promote other products are themselves continually refurbished as conjunctures change.



Who has the power to make, distribute and control pictures? Who gets represented, and in what ways?

Having re-presented the 'Thorn-EMI story' in 'The Companies You Keep', the text explains the in-built obsolescence of its own representation. Since most companies are vigorously motivated by the maximisation of profit, old markets have to be defended and new ones explored. 'This', the booklet explains, 'is why you may find that some of the information is no longer true if you are looking at this booklet much later than 1982, when it was published.' Similarly, stereotypes are not to be thought of as individual examples, for that way lie those interminable wranglings as to whether or not such images conform to a 'real' which we are supposed to share unproblematically in our 'common' sense.

In the past teachers have enthusiastically seized upon 'stereotypes', especially in advertising, as the best place to start teaching about media representations. This has too often resulted in a class describing more and more examples of stereotypes but understanding little about the ways in which they function or why their presence is so unrelenting. The 'Selling Pictures' booklet proposes that stereotypes are not so many different examples as much as those examples are part of 'the continuing process of stereotyping'. This distinction is the teaching pack's main strength. Stereotypes cannot be

understood simply by examining separate instances. What have to be learnt are the ways in which particular stereotypes are constructed, circulated and changed through different media and different discourses at different moments. This is to say that the process of categorisation which is part of the stereotyping process is never constant.

But stereotyping does not merely involve categorisation, it also involves a process of evaluation in that particular social (prejudicial) attitudes come to be held about stereotyped groups. Thus, the stereotyping process, constantly changing, constantly repeated, 'develops around the issue of power', for those who are stereotyped are never the same group of people who do the stereotyping. 'An oppressed group of workers will hold stereotyped views of bosses, for example, or a government in war time will encourage stereotyped views of the enemy.' This would seem to allow confirmation of that commonsense assertion so often made in the classroom, 'Well, everyone stereotypes everyone else so there can't be anything unfair about it.' But it is precisely at this pedagogical point (a point at which many of us have come frustratingly unstuck) that *Selling Pictures* equips both teachers and students with an understanding of why such an apparently

equivalent unfairness cannot be accepted at face value. A refusal to concede to the commonsense realism of 'that's just the way the world is' is made available by the qualifications the 'Selling Pictures' booklet makes: 'Powerful groups tend to ensure that stereotyped views of subordinate groups gain wide circulation – this is the kind of stereotyping which we concentrate on in this study.'

How these dominant stereotypes gain wide circulation is lucidly explained by the arguments and information offered in the 'The Companies You Keep' booklet. Too often it is complicated argument and information of this kind that we tend to summon up at the *end* of a lesson on stereotypes in order to explain why, badly and boringly, stereotyping is 'unfair' because it is used by profiteers to their own advantage. Even if these hastily cobbled together arguments about 'the economic' haven't confused students even further, their response is often 'Well, so what?' We can then only retreat into the safe fug of the staffroom despondent over our failure to teach our students why particular stereotypes are produced.

*Selling Pictures* shows how the stereotyping process can be seen to operate an ideological hegemony. This requires a class to entertain a consideration of history. The sample stereotypes of Scots and Latin Americans can be nothing but 'funny' until it is understood that those who have more reason to be careful with money are stereotyped as 'mean', that the enemy has to be represented as oily and deceitful to accentuate the virtue and honesty of those who are prepared to muscle out across 8000 miles to restore 'justice'. So although it might be true to say that stereotyping is a process that everyone engages in, those who have the power to circulate images ensure that their stereotypes dominate: 'In each case, the stereotype serves to deflect attention away from the issue of power and towards the qualities and characteristics that the stereotyped group is supposed to have. The implicit suggestion is that this group does not deserve power.' The obverse suggestion is that the dominant groups do deserve it. Thus hegemony is won by consent:

'Stereotyping exists to secure these arrangements and to secure the assent of those who experience them even when the arrangements work against the ultimate interests of some of the groups

affected. If we wish to change some of these arrangements, or even if we don't, it's important to understand that they are made and whose interests are served.'

'Selling Pictures' and 'The Companies You Keep' 'attempt to indicate that there can be links between the economic base of society and ideological processes.' As hegemony is won by consent so can it be contested and lost. Media Studies teachers have long argued that we can only begin to contest the dominant hegemony in the classroom when the economic contexts of the production and circulation of media artefacts (images, TV programmes, newspapers, magazines, radio programmes, films, videos, etc) are studied in conjunction with the textual analyses of those artefacts which deconstruction has enabled us to carry out.

Despite the realised necessity for such conjunctural teaching, however, there have been plenty of difficulties to deter us from actually doing it. Research into who owns what, when they acquired it and why, can be done but not easily by individuals who are hard pressed for time. And then there is always the fear that students will find this kind of 'straight' information just plain yawnsome. However, I would argue that students' attention sharpens quite considerably when they are taught that not only does an image address its appeal to a particular audience in particular ways – but that it does so not merely to meet the needs of the consumer/reader/passers-by but also to serve the interests of those who own the means of producing and circulating not just that image but a host of others too. And not just other images but other products which our wages stretch to accommodate in our homes and in our leisure time. Who can fail to be interested in images once we begin to understand the ways in which they are part of an economic structure which determines the very material of our lives?

The *Selling Pictures* pack equips teachers with a wide variety of materials and exercises to be used in the classroom. If each section was followed successively there would be enough to keep a class well occupied for about a year! The pack does, however, call for a more selective use. Intended 'for 4th/5th year secondary students and above', it can also be employed in the first year of secondary school and at the more advanced levels in FE colleges. Selections from

the materials according to what exactly is going to be taught and to whom can then be made. There is no reason why, for example, first year students should not begin to see how the companies we keep construct different gender audiences by studying the 'modes of address' which the front covers of magazines employ, nor why they could not construct likely or unlikely modes of address for magazine covers from the photosheets supplied. 'The Companies You Keep' could function as a straight text book but more would be gained by using it

discriminately. Since the language and arguments are not consistently comprehensible some pages are useful to inform 'teacher talk' while others can be duplicated wherever the already prepared case studies might elucidate or develop questions which have already been raised. And because a fairly minimal amount of equipment is required (access to a photocopier, a slide projector and screen) *Selling Pictures* is a truly portable feast. It should be carried from the Media Studies lesson to wherever English, Social Studies and Communications are taught.



## CABLE CULTURE COMMUNITY

A series of events on Monday evenings in November and December.

7.30pm in the cinema at South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell, Berks.

On December 19th Nicholas Garnham and Ian Connell will discuss the political and social implications of cable development. Speakers on other nights will include Cathy Denford and Martin Parry on community cable, and Michael Blakstad of T.V.S. There will also be screenings of showreels from various cable programmers.

For full details contact Barrie Gibson, Dave Stewart on 0344 27272

# IMAGES OF 'WOMAN'

## JUDITH WILLIAMSON INTRODUCES THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF CINDY SHERMAN

When I rummage through my wardrobe in the morning I am not merely faced with a choice what to wear. I am faced with a choice of images: the difference between a smart suit and a pair of overalls, a leather skirt and a cotton frock, is not just one of fabric and style, but one of identity. You know perfectly well that you will be seen differently for the whole day, depending on what you put on; you will appear as a particular kind of woman with one particular identity *which excludes others*. The black leather skirt rather rules out girlish innocence, oily overalls tend to exclude sophistication, ditto smart suit and radical feminism. Often I have wished I could put them all on together, or appear simultaneously in every possible outfit, just to say, Fuck you, for thinking any one of these is *me*. But also, See, I can be all of them.

This seems to me exactly what Cindy Sherman achieves in her series of 'Film Stills' and later 'Untitled' photographs. To present all those surfaces at once is such a superb way of flashing the images of 'Woman' back where they belong, in the recognition of the beholder. Sherman's pictures force upon the viewer that elision of image and identity which women experience all the time: as if the sexy black dress made you *be* a femme fatale, whereas 'femme fatale' is, precisely, an image; it needs a viewer to function at all. It's also just one splinter of the mirror, broken off from, for example, 'nice girl' or 'mother'. Cindy Sherman stretches this phenomenon in two directions at once – which makes the tension and sharpness of her work. *Within* each image, far from deconstructing the elision of image and identity, she very smartly leads the viewer to *construct* it; but by presenting a whole lexicon of feminine identities, all of them

played by 'her', she undermines your little constructions as fast as you can build them up.

'Image' has a double sense, both as the kind of woman fantasised (is your 'image' aggressive, cute, femme fatale, dumb blonde etc), and as the actual representation, the photograph. What Sherman does is to make you see the type of 'woman', of femininity, as inseparable from the literal presentation of the image – lighting, contrast, composition, photographic style. The 'Film Stills' are the most obvious example of this. The grainy print and ominous shadows in *Untitled Film Still No 4* are part of what makes up our idea of the woman shown leaning against the door. The low angle, crisp focus and sharp contrasts of *Untitled Film Still No 16* are part of the woman's sophisticated yet fragile image, just as the slightly soft focus and low contrast of *No 40* are part of *her* more pastoral, Renoiresque femininity. The composition of the recognisably 'New Wave Art Movie' still *No 63*, the smallness of the figure in the harshly geometric architecture, is part of the little-girl-lostness that we feel as coming from the woman. In the 'Untitled Film Stills' we are constantly forced to recognise a visual style (often you could name the director) simultaneously with a type of femininity. The two cannot be pulled apart. The image suggests that there is a particular kind of femininity in the *woman* we see, whereas in fact the femininity is in the image itself, it *is* the image – 'a surface which suggests nothing but itself, and yet in so far as it suggests there is something behind it, prevents us from considering it as a surface'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Louis Bandry, 'The Mask', *Afterimage* (UK) no 5, Spring 1974, p 27.



Apart from the interest of this for anyone analysing how film and photographic representations work, it is, as I have tried to suggest, particularly important for women. I find the recognition of this process, that the 'woman' is constructed in the image, very liberating; I want to say yah boo sucks to any man standing next to me looking at the photos in the exhibition. Because the viewer is forced into complicity with the way these 'women' are constructed: you recognise the styles, the 'films', the 'stars', and at that moment when you recognise the picture, your reading *is* the picture. In a way, 'it' is innocent: *you* are guilty, you supply the femininity simply through social and cultural knowledge. As one reviewer says, 'she shows us that, in a sense, we've bought the goods.'<sup>2</sup> The stereotypes and assumptions necessary to 'get' each picture are found in our own heads. Yet, at the risk of being attacked as 'essentialist', I really do think the complicity of viewing is different for women and men. For women, I feel it shows us that we needn't buy the goods, or at least, we needn't buy them as being our 'true selves'. But in a discussion at the first Cindy Sherman retrospective in this country, at Bristol's Watershed Gallery in May, I remember a man getting incredibly worked up about how sexist the images were, and furious at Cindy Sherman. He kept saying there were enough images of women as sexual objects, passive, doll-like, all tarted up. Although his rhetoric sounded Right On, I was certain his anger must have come from a sense of his own involvement, the way those images speak not only *to* him but *from* him – and he kept blaming Sherman herself for it, deflecting his sexism onto her, as if she really were a bit of a whore. This idea of what she 'really is' I'll return to later. But the way we are forced to supply the femininity 'behind' the photos through *recognition* is part of their power in showing how an ideology works – not by undoing it, but by *doing* it. The moment we recognise a 'character', it is as if she must already exist.

For what we construct from the surface of each picture is an interior, a mixture of emotions. Each setting, pose and facial expression seems literally to express an almost immeasurable interior which is at once mysteriously deep, and

totally impenetrable: a feminine identity. Obviously this is what acting is about, but these still images are like frozen moments of performance and so the sense of personality seems more trapped in the image itself. It is both so flat, and so full (it seems) of feeling. But what links the emotions portrayed in the pictures is that they are all emotional *responses*. The woman's expression is like an imprint of a situation, there is some action and her face registers a *reaction*. Certain photos make this very explicit: *Untitled No 96*, where a girl holds a scrap of newspaper in her hand, shows precisely the way that we read into her fundamentally 'unreadable' face some emotional response which is both very definite, and entirely ambiguous. She looks thoughtful, but whether she is happy or unhappy, worried or perfectly all right, we have no clue. She looks, exactly, uncertain. Yet between the newspaper cutting and her face there is an endless production of significance which seems inevitable (it's always already started) and almost clear in its vagueness. Another photo from the same group, *Untitled No 90*, shows a teenager lying, equally ambiguous in her expression, by a telephone. Is she happily dreaming, or anxiously awaiting a call? (It's just like the ads for home pregnancy testing kits which manage to get the model looking both as if she's hopefully waiting for the good news of having a baby, *and* as if she can't wait to be put out of her fear that she might be pregnant.) Either way, her expression is an index of something or someone else, something we don't know about but which everything in the frame points to. (In semiotic terms it literally is an index, as a footprint is to a foot – a relevant metaphor since so many Sherman women look as if they were trodden on by men, fate, or a B-movie plot.) With the cutting, the telephone, or the letter in *Untitled Film Still No 5* (where there seems to be a response to two things – the letter, and someone else off screen left) something is put in the image as a snippet to represent the unknown narrative; but these images simply make explicit what happens in all of them, which is that meaning is thrown endlessly back and forth between a 'woman' and a story. The cutting gives expression to the face, the face gives a story to the cutting.

This is exactly what happens in films, news-photos, adverts and media generally. An image of a woman's face in tears will be used by a paper

<sup>2</sup> Michael Starenko, 'What's an Artist to Do?', *Afterimage* (US), January 1983.

or magazine to show by *impression* the tragedy of a war, or the intensity of, say, a wedding. From the face we are supposed to read the emotion of the event. But conversely, it is the event that gives the emotion to the face; we have to know whether it is a war or a wedding to interpret correctly its well of meaning. Similarly in films the use of close-ups – woman screaming, woman weeping, woman watching, woman terrified, woman impressed(!) – function as an imprint of the action, like a thermometer constantly held to the narrative. And no matter what the nature or content of the imprint, it is this imprintedness itself which seems to constitute femininity.

In Sherman's 'Film Stills' the very reference to film invites this interpretation. Film stills are by definition a moment in a narrative. In every still, the woman suggests something other than herself, she is never complete: a narrative has to be invoked. Who, or what, is the dark-haired woman in *No 16* responding to? What is troubling the Hitchcockian heroine in *No 21*? What is that young girl in *No 40* looking sideways at? But in the later works simply called 'Untitled', the questions are perhaps more interesting and subtle, precisely because they aren't presented as 'film stills'. *Something* is worrying, not to say frightening, the women in photos like *Untitled No 80* – at least 90 minutes worth of something. In this group, back-projection is used to create the setting, the backdrop scenario which interacts with the woman's face to produce the story, and the visual effect stays quite close to film. The next series, from which *Untitled No 90* and *No 96* were selected, comes closer in to the woman's body than many of the earlier works, but still adds a prop, a clue to the story. However, the most recent work uses no props and a less 'filmy' style, so we seem to be nearer an actual woman, presented more 'neutrally'. These photos are closer to adverts than films; they still rely on clothes, lighting and a facial expression which is evocative of something outside the frame. Here we don't get *any* of the story, only the response.

But the point is, the story *is her*. As we piece together, or guess, or assume, some meaning in the narrative, we find that the meaning is the woman. She appears to express the meaning of events. How like every narrative and photographic medium this is, and also how like actual life, the 'they've got it, she wears it' of personal relations. In tapping the relation

between women and meaningfulness Sherman's work resonates through many other areas. Certainly it also illuminates the process of reading all still images, especially adverts, in the way objects, details, arrangements and settings construct a story and an identity simultaneously. Women are not always necessarily a part of this visual and ideological process. But in Sherman's work, what comes out of the imagined narratives is, specifically, femininity. It is not just a range of feminine expressions that are shown but the *process* of the 'feminine' as an effect, something acted upon.

However this femininity is not all form and no content. The emotions that bounce between the narrative and the woman in each picture, though unclear, are nearly all suggestive of fear, suspicion, vulnerability, anxiety, or at best, uncertainty. And Sherman brilliantly shows how this vulnerability is linked with eroticism, not always through explicitly 'sexual' poses – as in *Untitled No 103* and some of the earlier 'Film Stills' (not shown here but much shown elsewhere) – but through performing femininity at their intersection. In the earlier work, particularly, there always seems to be a sense of menace, the woman is under threat. And her vulnerability is always erotic, rather in the way that many horror movies which involve no explicit sex at all give an erotic spin-off just through having a terrified woman constantly in vulnerable positions. So strongly is femininity evoked in these situations that they have to be *sexual* – is there any definition of femininity that isn't? That's why, in so many of Sherman's images, simply the distress or passivity of the women figures feels faintly pornographic – I say that to be descriptive rather than pejorative. I feel Sherman simply brings to the surface very clearly that same whiff of the pornographic that I personally feel about so many of Hitchcock's heroines, frightened, blonde and vulnerable, or Godard's use of Anna Karina and other women stars as fathomless icons of femininity, passive repositories of desire. Sherman's women with their parted lips and their stories in their eyes (very Bob Dylan) are something to get off on in their very uncertainty. And in linking the erotic and the vulnerable she has hit a raw nerve of 'femininity'. I don't by this mean women (though we do experience it) but the *image* of women, an imaginary, fragmentary identity found not only in photos and films but the social

fabric of our thoughts and feelings.

It is so important to stress the difference not because 'femininity' is just a bad, false, two-dimensional construct that is forced upon us (even if it feels that way) but precisely because, ultimately, it isn't any one thing at all. It can only exist in opposition to something else, like one half of a see-saw. In Sherman's pictures, the way the woman is *affected by* something makes her like an *effect*, her face stamped by events, and I have tried to argue that this produces the feminine sexual identity which comes across. But what is crucial to the reading of Sherman's work is also the opposition between the images. 'Essentially feminine' as they all are, they are all different. This not only rules out the idea that any one of them *is* the 'essentially feminine', but also shows, since each *seems* to be it, that there can be no such thing. Yet so tenacious is the wish for this set of psychic garments to turn out to be actual skin, that almost every time Sherman's work is written about the issue of Cindy Sherman 'herself' comes into it. She has often been thought of as *indulging* in self-images, wishing secretly to be like Marilyn Monroe, posing as a sexy heroine. From the notion that her work springs from a desire to be more glamorous follows the idea that she is not 'really' as attractive as her heroines, the glamour is not allowed to be hers.

The best example of such an approach is Waldemar Januszczak reviewing her retrospective at Bristol in the *Guardian*: 'You see her as she sees herself, a small, scrawny girl from Buffalo, a mousey blond who dreams of becoming a peroxide starlet. Her wigs don't always fit and her bra has to be padded.' What a combination of put-down and turn-on! 'Behind the Marilyn Monroe character you finally find Cindy Sherman.' How? Does he know her? 'She is at her best looking intense, staring into the distance as intently as if it were her own past - which of course it is ...' and finally, 'Several times she appears to be recoiling from the harsh stare of her own camera, like a scared animal trapped in a car's headlights. This too, you sense, is the real Cindy Sherman.'<sup>3</sup> This all reads like a patently sexual fantasy, as if she were at somebody's mercy (his). If Sherman were a

man he would not even continue using her first name as well as surname beyond the first paragraph; and this detail of language might make him have to treat her as an artist, in control of her work. As it was, even the image selected to illustrate the article was one of the most sexually provocative. I have quoted this review in detail first to show that it is a possible response to the work (basically for men) but secondly because I think that this false search for the 'real' her is exactly what the work is about, and it leads people like Waldemar Januszczak right up the garden path. The attempt to find the 'real' Cindy Sherman is unfulfillable, just as it is for anyone, but what's so interesting is the obsessive *drive* to find that identity.

This comes out particularly in comments on the later photos. Almost every critic has felt the recent work is in some way moving closer to Sherman 'herself'. The catalogue introduction calls it 'free of references to archetypes' and says that 'dressed in today's clothes ... the(se) portraits seem more refined, natural and closer to Cindy Sherman herself.'<sup>4</sup> But in the more recent photos there seem to me to be sets of contrasts that function in the same way as the earlier 'Film Stills', only even more pointedly. For some reason most critics have seen *Untitled No 103* but somehow gone blind to *Untitled No 104*, which immediately follows it and would stand beside it in a gallery. There, right next to the sexy Monroe-type image is a different one - not necessarily unsexy or unsexual but very boyish, much more alert, wearing an old t-shirt - and, most important, they are both her. The fact that it *is* Cindy Sherman performing each time is precisely what undermines the idea that any one image is 'her'. It reminds me of the Cachet ad: 'It won't be the same on any two women ... the perfume as individual as *you* are.' This promise is followed by a bunch of images of different 'femininities', each of which is meant to be a different *woman* (using Cachet); whereas what Sherman shows is that anyone can 'be' all of them, and none.

In the recent photos the issue seems to be pushed still farther, beyond different femininities and across the border of femininity/masculinity. This is particularly powerful because the later

<sup>3</sup> Waldemar Januszczak, 'Here's Looking at You, Kid', the *Guardian*, May 19, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Els Barents, 'Introduction', *Cindy Sherman*, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, 1982, p 10.

106 images do appear more 'realistic', though of course they are nothing of the sort. *Untitled No 116* and *No 112* both seem very straightforward, 'natural' poses compared with the earlier set-ups. Both are 'dressed in today's clothes', yet it is the subtlety in the difference between the clothes that makes one image very feminine, the other masculine. In *No 116* the lighting, pose, expression, gaze, hair, skin, all spell femininity, subtly, but as clearly as in *Film Still No 40*. But *No 112* is sharper: the pointed collar, the shorts, the 'harder' gaze, less unfixed than the other, all produce a 'masculine' reading. The way the later images move towards, not simply sexual ambiguity (as if that were an identity) but a juxtaposing of 'feminine' and 'masculine' identities, seems to demolish once and for all the idea that either of these is something that can be fully inhabited (and also the wet-dream of Sherman as frightened animal or girl in padded bra).

For the identities elusively suggested, and so obsessively sought, are trapped, not in a car's headlights (for goodness sake) but, literally, in the light of the photographic print: the lighting which makes the image possible on that surface which is ultimately nothing more than a flattened reaction to light. In *Untitled No 110* no face is even visible in the darkness, all that the lighting lets us see is an arm, a sleeve, some soft fabric, glowing as golden as an advert. There is only just enough photographic information for us to recognise what the image is of at all, and here again we are forced to realise how these effects on their own (as in so many ads) conjure up a feminine presence. The viewer is pushed as far as possible, to search in shadows for what isn't there on the page, but which the few shapes of light suggest *is* there. Femininity is trapped in the image – but the viewer is snared too. A similar and very witty rebuffing of our 'reading in' is found in *Untitled Film Still No 46*, where all that's visible of the woman is a diving mask looking up from the sea. We can't even see the face, and barely the eyes, yet the joke is, it *still* seems full of meaning.

In images like this one, in the whole range of work, in the juxtapositions made, there seems to me an enormous amount of wit. The conflation

of Cindy Sherman as the imagined character in her performance, and Sherman as the artist, always ends up with some idea of 'her' as her heroines, frightened, vulnerable, threatened and uncertain. But clearly as an artist Sherman is sharp, controlled, intelligent, witty. Couldn't these qualities of the work itself, rather than being swamped by that femininity she exposes, reflect back on it as a biting comment? Obviously the dialectic between Sherman as performer and photographer is important, after all, she *does* choose to present *herself* (in disguise) in her pictures. The identities she acts out may be passive and fearful. But look what she *does* with them, what she *makes*: she is in control. In its very last line, the catalogue blurb turns on some of Sherman's critics: 'the women she represents, they say, are too artificial to be experienced as real people' and ends by asking poignantly, 'Is vulnerability as unreal as all that?'<sup>5</sup> Well no, obviously not. But both the critics referred to, and the writer of the commentary, are opposing 'artificial' and 'real' in a way that has no meaning where femininity is concerned, which is why I started this piece with the wardrobe syndrome. Femininity is multiple, fractured, and yet each of its infinite surfaces gives the illusion of depth and wholeness. Realising this means that we as women don't have to get trapped trying to 'be' the depth behind a *surface*, and men just might bang their heads up against it and stop believing in that reflected space. Sherman's work is more than either a witty parody of media images of women, or a series of self-portraits in a search for identity. The two are completely mixed up, as are the imagery and experience of femininity for all of us. Others might try to break open that web of mirrors, but Sherman's way of revealing it is just to keep on skilfully turning the kaleidoscope where a few fragments of fantasy go a long way.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p 14.



Untitled Film Still No 4, 1978



Untitled Film Still No 40, 1979



Untitled Film Still No 16, 1978



Untitled Film Still No 63, 1980



Untitled No 96, 1981





Untitled No 90, 1981

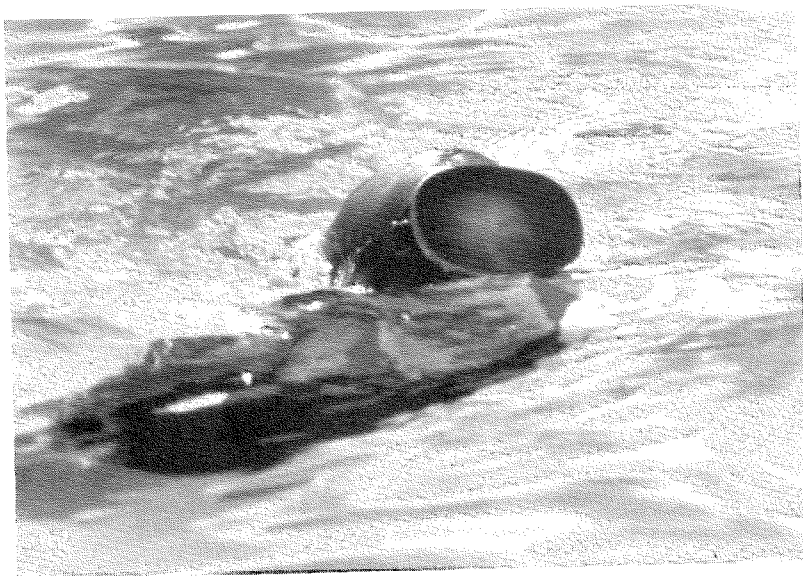


Untitled Film Still No 5, 1978





Untitled Film Still No 21, 1978



Untitled Film Still No 46, 1979



Untitled No 103, 1982



Untitled No 104, 1982



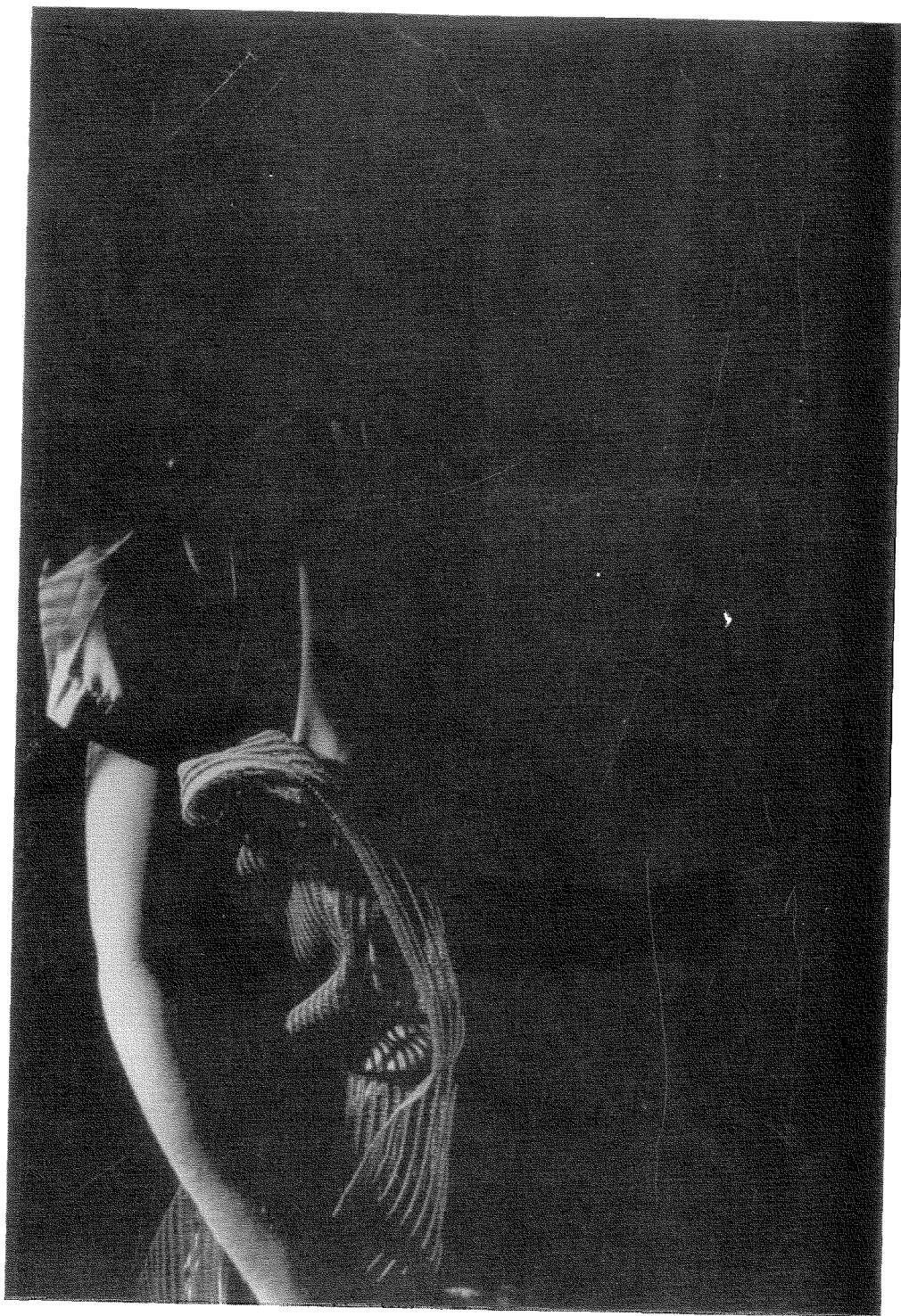
Untitled No 116, 1982





Untitled No 112, 1982

116



Untitled No 110, 1982